

The emergence of new imagery in quality television fiction¹

ANNA TOUS

*Associate Professor at the Communication Sciences Faculty of
the Autonomous University of Barcelona*

anna.tous@uab.cat

Abstract

An analysis of successful US series, both in terms of audience and critics, such as The West Wing (NBC 1999-2006), Lost (ABC 2004-), Desperate Housewives (ABC 2004-), House, M.D. (Fox 2004-) and CSI: Crime Scene Investigation (CBS 2000-) allows us to state that the traditional themes and myths survive in TV fiction, irrespective of the conditioning factors for production in the audiovisual industry, sharing space with a new self-referential TV imaginary. The recurrence of themes and myths belongs to the area of the signified (content plane) and meta-television references reside in the area of the signifier (expression plane), with the corresponding consequences with regard to creativity and the originality of the products. Inter-textuality obeys the pleasure of recognition, as the new TV imaginary arises and adapts itself to the audiences' new interests. The meta-television references can be structured along the lines of a TV grid, depending on their intention to devour and unite the rest of the TV programming. The meta-television nature is considered to be a characteristic of the medium's degree of maturity, as well as self-reference and hypervisibility.

Key words

Intertextuality, thematic recurrence, mythical recurrence, metatelevision reference, US quality television series.

Resum

L'anàlisi de sèries nord-americanes d'èxit de públic i de crítica com El ala oeste de la Casa Blanca (The West Wing, NBC 1999-2006), Perdidos (Lost, ABC 2004-), Mujeres desesperadas (Desperate Housewives, ABC 2004-), House (House, M.D., Fox 2004-) i CSI: Las Vegas (CSI: Crime Scene Investigation, CBS 2000-) ens permet afirmar que els temes i els mites tradicionals perviuen en la ficció televisiva, independentment dels condicionants productius de la indústria audiovisual, compartint espai amb un nou imaginari televisiu autoreferencial. La recurrència temàtica i mítica pertany a l'àmbit del significat (pla del contingut) i les referències metatelevisives es troben en l'àmbit del significat (pla de l'expressió), amb les corresponents conseqüències quant a la creativitat i l'originalitat dels productes. La intertextualitat obeeix al plaer del reconeixement, ja que el nou imaginari televisiu sorgeix adaptant-se als nous interessos de l'audiència. Les referències metatelevisives es poden estructurar en funció d'una graella televisiva, d'acord amb la seva intencionalitat fagocitadora i aglutinadora de la resta de programació televisiva. El caràcter metatelevisiu es considera una característica pròpia del grau de maduresa del mitjà, així com l'autoreferencialitat i la hipervisibilitat.

Paraules clau

Intertextualitat, recurrència temàtica i mítica, referències metatelevisives, sèries televisives estatunidenques de qualitat.

Introduction: corpus of analysis

This article examines the emergence and existence of new imagery in quality American television fiction, which today co-exists with myths and traditional themes. The emergence of new imagery² can be seen by analysing a number of quality American television series representative of the drama genre: *The West Wing*, (NBC 1999-2006), *CSI: Las Vegas* (*CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*, CBS 2000-), *Lost*, (ABC 2004-), *Desperate Housewives*, (ABC 2004-) and *House, M.D.*, (Fox 2004-). Each of these series is paradigmatic of a concrete sub-genre - political, detective, adventure and science fiction, soap operas and hospital dramas, respectively - and all are expo-

nents of the revival of quality television, known as the golden age of drama (Longworth 2000-2002). The terms "quality TV" (Jancovich and Lyons 2003 and Feuer, Kerr and Vahimagi 1984) and "must-see TV" (Jancovich and Lyons 2003) refer to a type of television that has retrieved quality as an emblem³ in the oscillation between the totally interchangeable fiction and reality genres (Vilches 2004: 6). These programmes are outside the "flow" of television (Williams 1974) and have become must-see TV, thanks to their style or audience response. We consider these terms more appropriate than the term "cult series" (Tous 2006), since the series in question do not belong to a restricted audience, as is true of cult products, but are rather commercial mainstream hits (see Gwenllian-

Jones and Pearson 2004). As audiovisual products, US fiction television series are conditioned by productive logic, thematic recurrence and genericity.

1. Productive logic

The conception of thematic synergies is based on the logic of the audiovisual market to boost profits by extracting them from ideas and products. American television's hypertextuality⁴ is joined by Western culture's intertextual character, which is fostered by production conditions. Television production in America has been characterised by internal hypertextuality from the start. Terms typically used by the industry to refer to repetition devices are spin-off, franchise, thematisation, cloning, copy-cat and fanfic (fan fiction). Epigones, hypertextual continuation and commercial diegetic expansion also belong to this realm.⁵ The various repetition devices originate in a desire to profit from a successful idea. Paradigmatic examples of repetition devices are the cloned franchises spun-off from a matrix series (*CSI: Las Vegas*, *CSI: Miami* and *CSI: New York*),⁶ as well as the epigones rooted in a certain product, such as *Invasion* (ABC: 2005-) and *Threshold* (CBS: 2005-) which are take-offs of *Lost*.

2. Genericity

New genres that are created usually reference the theoretical underpinnings of their corresponding genealogies and genre hybridisation reinforces genre brands to facilitate viewer recognition. A genre's function and recurrence to meta-television is thus consolidated, since this allows the maximum diversification of information in a uniformity of formulas (Wolf 1984: 194). We differentiate between optional and obligatory genre recurrence (Ryan 1979) and thematic recurrence *per se*, i.e., themes that reappear regardless of genre. Just as the medium of television encourages viewers' recognition of genres, competition among genres (generic visual experience)⁷ conditions viewership.

3. Thematic recurrence (culture)

Nowadays, recurrence and reference may occur because of the impossibility of escaping the above, given the saturation of themes and characters in fiction (Barthes 1968, Genette 1982 and Kristeva 1966 and 1996). Thematic recurrence is characterised by the maintenance of a mythical strain that has survived in the cultural tradition and is present in the American television series we have analysed.

Thematic synergies impoverish the cultural atmosphere, which is still fuelled by the traditional myths and themes underlying cultural productions (Tomasevskij 1982), although they are on the wane as television's maturity as a medium and its consequent self-reference wax. Recurrent ingredients are those that remain in a textual production although they are not valid in relation to the genre. The selection of themes from a limited repertoire is constitutive of the narrative.

Thematic recurrence is characterised by the repetition of a

motif (we observed the reiteration of the recurrence in the series we analysed), which is not limited to the hypertext-hypertext (Genette 1982) relationship, but ranges beyond it; thus, the literary motif's genealogy can be traced and the anthropological reasons for its survival and presence in cultural production can be studied. Mythic recurrence contains the myth's communication.

The articulation of novelty and change is produced by the audience's and creators' desire to present familiar themes in contemporary television series as if they were new. The stratification and hybridisation of the texts guarantee the presence of the dichotomies of *continuity* and *change*, *stability* and *novelty* (Duch 1995), especially in a serial product. Permanence allows viewers to know what they can expect; change and novelty ensure a renewed interest in the product. Thematic recurrence can be broken down into literary, biblical and religious, scholarly and thematic and mythical recurrence.⁸

2. Thematic recurrence versus meta-television references

The analysis of themes in these five television series requires a differentiation between thematic recurrence and meta-television references. As we have said on other occasions (Tous 2004), thematic recurrence consists in the reiteration of themes in cultural productions, the constant reappearance of a series of ingredients of literary origin - or literary coincidence with a common mythic origin. Thematic recurrence is a function of the mythic relationship among several ingredients of a motif or theme that lasts over time without any relationship to the regularities of genre inherent in the motif or theme in question. Recurrence originates in repetition, which is a *sine qua non* condition, yet it does not suffice. What differentiates thematic recurrence from meta-television references is the repetition's meaning. References are mere repetition for descriptive, parodistic or clichéd, stereotypical purposes. These references' sole function is to parody or use socially shared referents for a broader audience; they have no other communicative function. The meta-television references in the series we analysed have been divided into categories according to television programming that include intra-episodic references to the same series and references to other series, game shows, music, advertising, news, films or comics and cartoons.⁹ The number of references to one of these typologies, in addition to other references (historical and political in *The West Wing*, sports, video games and the Internet in *House*), characterises series and are profiled according to audience, seeking the pleasure of recognition.

As for the term "meta-television", the available nomenclature differentiates among three major television ages from the medium's advent to when the series in this study began to air: paleotelevision, neotelevision (Eco 1983 and Casetti and Odin 1990) and meta-television (Olson 1987, 1990 and Carlón 2006) or post-television (Missika 2006¹⁰ and Imbert 2007 and 2008).¹¹

Table 1. The typology and function of hypertextual relationships

Function	Satirical, ironic, parodistic	Serious, not satirical, pastiche	Descriptive	
			Metaphorical	
			Referentiality	Meta-televisual
				Thematic recurrence
Degree of signification	Significant (plane of expression)	Significant (plane of content)		
Relationship	Transformation	Imitation		

Source: The author

The typology and function of hypertextual relationships

We propose a *typology* and *function* of *hypertextual* relationships, followed by a *morphological typology* below, all of which stem from an analysis of references in the five television series.

The classification table of hypertextual relationships above is based on Genette (1982: 38). A text's descriptive, metaphorical or referential function stem from its hypertextual relationships. Quantitatively, the references as a whole belong to the signifier (plane of expression), because of their lack of meaning. Their function can be parodistic, self-referential or character building and belongs to meaning (plane of contents) in cases of thematic recurrence.

Another case of parody is Sawyer's customary use of reference when he addresses the other survivors on the island: he calls Jack "Doc" as of the pilot episode ("Whatever you say, Doc, You're the hero") and Walt is called "Tattoo", the name of a character in *Fantasy Island* (ABC 1978-1984), who was a sort of assistant to the protagonist.¹² The classification of self-referential references by television programming has already been mentioned: the meta-televisual references in the five series, which belong to the signifier, coincide in a common area and are conditioned by and condition collective imagery.

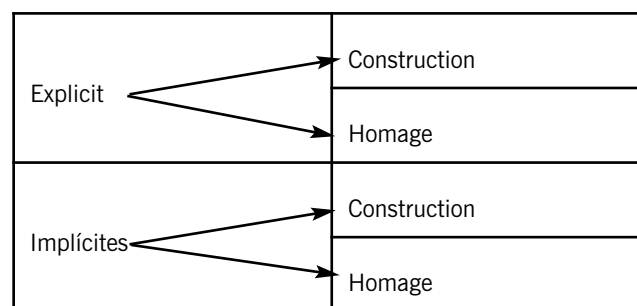
As for character construction, we highlight the cases of *House* (for the explicit references that reinforce those implicit in Sherlock Holmes, the hypotext upon which House's character is configured), Grissom in *CSI* and Bartlet in *The West Wing* (scholarly references by characters characterised by the conjunction of leadership and knowledge).

The different hypertextual references have a completely heterogeneous morphology that can be classified as follows: as a homage – the occasional quotation or allusion – or for construction (imitation of its hypotext). The references may be explicit or implicit.

The occasional quotation or allusion can be found, e.g., in the reference to *Basic Instinct* that evokes the famous scene

Morphological typology

References



in which Sharon Stone is forbidden to smoke. The suspect explicitly mentions the film and the actress.¹³ Also in *CSI*, in the recurrent case of the prostitute and the redeemer, Nick comments: "This ain't *Pretty Woman*."¹⁴ The constructive quotation takes place in a scene, dialogue or reference that imitates its hypotext (Genette 1982), e.g., the luxury of a mansion that conceals vices or criminal behaviour.¹⁵ The references may be explicit, such as Bras' reference to the series *Cops*¹⁶ or Nick's above-mentioned reference to *Pretty Woman*. Or they may be implicit, such as the unspecified homage to Medea, which is nevertheless ascertained by the reiteration of parricide by mothers in watery environments. The citation can be verbal ("I could cause a scene like in *Silence of the Lambs*"),¹⁷ visual (the recreation of the scene in *Ghost*¹⁸ or *The Portrait of Dorian Gray*)¹⁹ or scenic, which mixes verbal and visual citations.

4. Cases of thematic recurrence in the series analysed

The five series we analysed allow us to affirm that contemporary American audiovisual narrative is still laced with thematic recurrence and that, at the same time, the repetition of inter-

textual references in television is especially important in the area of meta-televisual and self-referential references.

Regardless of the source of thematic recurrence, the themes are subordinate to the constellations with which Durand organises the human imagination (Durand 1960). Recurrent thematic figurations are reiterated (and updated) from a synchronic point of view, thanks to the mythic ingredient that shapes some of the themes, in sync with the use of thematic recurrence in audiovisual narrative.

The permanence of several thematic recurrences that coincide in different kinds of series and subgenres allows us to continue to cite the existence of thematic recurrence. In more than one of the series we have analysed, we noted the thematic recurrence of the father figure - the search for a father (*The West Wing* and *House*), the sacrificial princess (*Lost* and *CSI*), the prostitute and the redeemer (*The West Wing* and *CSI*), the doppelganger (*Lost* and *Desperate Housewives*) and the pairing of antithetical characters for comic purposes (*Desperate Housewives* and *The West Wing*). Audiovisual products were analysed in relation to their genre or genres (diachronic perspective) for a subsequent updating of themes and myths (synchronic perspective). The methodology used for the synchronic analysis of myths and themes was based on the diachronic comparativism of Ginzburg (1989), Dumézil (1973), Nagy (2006) and Lévi-Strauss (1969) and Propp (1940).

The search for the father is a literary theme that has been articulated in the US hospital genre since the father-son relationship of Dr. Right (Dr. Kildare [NBC 1961-1966] and Marcus Welby, M.D. [ABC 1969-1976]) until today's conflictive relationship in *House* and *Lost*. In *House*'s case, the relationships between Chase and House and their respective fathers becomes a subversion of genre as well as theme.²⁰ Chase is conflicted about his father because of his abandonment of the family ("Cursed", 1.13) and neither is his father-son relationship normal. This conflict is a frequent occurrence in the hospital series of the 1990s and first decade of this century, the "new hospital dramas", in Jacobs' words (2003): Grey in *Grey's Anatomy* (ABC 2005-) and Doug Ross in *ER* (NBC 1994-). Respect for the father figure is associated with the hierarchical relationship and transmission of knowledge of the TV series of the 1950s and 1960s. The sceptical society of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries is portrayed as not lacking in paternal referents, but rather in conflict with them. The search for the father, one of the recurrent themes in the history of literature, is introduced into medical drama in its negative and conflicted version.²¹

The father figure is also primordial in *The West Wing* but, in this case, it is because President Bartlet's paternalism coincides with the recovery of national pride the series incites. The American political genre had an initial cinematographic phase of praising the president (Lincoln in *The Birth of a Nation*, D. W. Griffith 1915), followed by connivance between presidents and television, in no way incompatible with political satire. The president's image also suffered in the convulsive 1970s from

the social point of view and as regards repercussions in the media (*All the President's Men*, Alan Pakula 1976) (Crawley 2006). *The West Wing* revives the early presidents' good image, without obviating their facet as men of action, exacerbated in the late 1990s (*Air Force One*, Wolfgang Petersen 1997) or the link between personal life and respect for the institution (*The President and Miss Wade*, *The American President*, Rob Reiner 1995, whose screenplay was written by Aaron Sorkin). Bartlet is a Nobel Prize Winner in Economics, the most scholarly character in *The West Wing*; in short, his character is constructed from paternalism, morality and intellectuality.

In *Lost*, Claire acts as a sacrificial princess and Ethan Rom as a threatening animal. Rom threatens to keep killing off the characters one by one (sustaining the invariant element of tales in which dragons used to carry off one maiden every night) if they do not give Claire back to him to act as bait for trapping the other characters ("Homecoming", 1.15). Agent Sara Sidle in *CSI* offers to act as bait for a dangerous serial killer ("The Strip Strangler", 1.23). There are four basic ingredients in this motif: a kidnapping, a woman, a killer and a hero. The motif is made up of the actors' functions and Greimas' model canonical narrative schema (Greimas 1976, 1979). The reason for the reiteration of the sacrificial princess motif is thus three-sided, made up of the sacrificial and sacrificed woman, rapacious snake (Propp 1987: 318-319) and the hero who saves the town.

Another thematic recurrence in the series we are analysing is the close relationship between a male protagonist and a prostitute, present in the characters of Nick and Kristy in *CSI* ("1-15 Murders", 1.11; "Boom", 1.13) as well as Sam and Laurie in *The West Wing*. The consequences are identical in the two series: the protagonist's repentance, discontent with hierarchical superiors and the perverse utilisation of antagonists. The motif is two-sided: the dangerous woman and the redemptive man. A male character with positive value attributes forges a friendship and maintains sexual relations with a prostitute. This references the man who sins, yet distances himself from the woman (the femme fatale) in order to redeem himself. Nick, the motif's protagonist in *CSI*, makes an explicit allusion to the film, "This ain't *Pretty Woman*" ("Boom", 1.13), which characterises self-referential quotations. As a biblical motif, it refers to Jesus and Maria Magdalena. The two cases of recurrence observed in these series demonstrate the validity of the traditional opposition of the saintly, angelical woman and the prostitute, the perfidious vampire. A redemptive saving role or resistance to temptation is reserved for the man. Gubern refers to it as a "cultural masculinist archetype" (Gubern 2002: 61).

The figure of the double or doppelganger was articulated during *Desperate Housewives*' first season: the explicitly dual characters are Dana/Zach, Mary Alice/Angela, Maisy/Deirdre. This duality correlates with the concealment of identity, while is linked to the mystery of the first season's main plot. The characters' duplicity fans the intrigue before their identities are

revealed²². In *Lost*, the series combines inner and external alterity or 'otherness'. The genre of adventure in an unknown land is an artistic or communicative depiction of the discovery of oneself and thus, of this duality and is materialised in the children in *Lord of the Flies* (William Golding 1954) who turn into savages and the encounter of the characters in *Lost* with their most profound Ids (basically thanks to analepses), to provide two examples. The term *doppelgänger* is used to describe this theme, which is especially popular in fantasy and science fiction and virtually synonymous with inner alterity.

The paring of antithetical characters for comic relief can be found in *The West Wing* and *Desperate Housewives*. To a large extent, the comic elements in the latter stem from the character of Susan (Teri Hatcher) and her relationship with Edie (Nicolette Sheridan). The relationship not only is based on Susan's nature as a feminine clown, but is similar to the couples whose humour originated in their antagonism (Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy, Quixote and Sancho Panza, Lord John Marbury and Leo in *The West Wing* ("Lord John Marbury", 1.11.)). The combination of two antagonistic characters linked by a friendship or rivalry is a frequently used device in cultural productions. In most cases, one of the two is more intelligent than the other, an imbalance that gives rise to comic situations.

An analysis of the series' themes and genres ratifies Navarro's dominant hypothesis (1914), Jauss' horizon of expectations (1977) and the genre's relevance as a social institution (Newcomb 1974 and Neale 1980). Thus, series such as *CSI* and *Lost* reference the myth of Prometheus (progress), in *CSI*'s case with extremely conservative nuances, while *Lost* adds the supernatural theme to it; *Desperate Housewives* is articulated on the basis of "Bovary-ism" and ambiguity, because of the *doppelgänger* and the idyllic gardens that conceal vice and criminal behaviour (typical of Lynch's films); *House* contains the figure of the mad genius and the search for the father and *The West Wing* contains the same father figure, yet in a reverential manner that constitutes the series' focal point: the recovery of national pride.

5. The characteristics of series in the meta-television age

Our analysis allows us to affirm the existence of several characteristics common to all the series in the corpus:

- They are subject to editing
- They acquire maturity
- They condition collective imagery
- They are fragmentary
- They are agglutinating and phagocytic
- They are lax and mythical

The establishment of television invariants is a symptom of the medium's maturity and the machinery's hypervisibility: the medium's maturity is the source of both the use of meta-tele-

vision references as well as their specification. Self-referentiality consists in adhering to a common area easily recognised by viewers, with no meaning other than mere transmission. Intertextual meta-television recurrences do not have the meaning typical of thematic and mythical recurrences; instead they take on new, eminently socio-cultural, widely understood meanings. Villanueva notes that the existence of literary invariants requires a literary theory (Villanueva 1994), in the same way that television invariants require a television theory, since they are the drivers of copying and reproduction on television and fulfil the same function as literary invariants.

Television programming tends to elasticity and dynamism, conditioned by the uniformity of certain programmes. As is true of non-fiction, the unique spaces contain diverse ones and the diverse ones are increasingly similar (Deleuze 1968; Calabrese 1989). Television programming's apparently thematic standardisation contains a certain multiplicity: the focus on a single theme from a multitude of perspectives. This two-fold process is the source of the container programmes (*Celebrity Big Brother*), paradigmatic of meta-television, which are characterised by their attempts to condense television's flow. The structural mechanism of repetition inherent in television programming comes together in a series of typically meta-televisual products that, obeying this two-fold process, contain, although in fragments, several programmes in the line-up and fill them with a series of identical products, which reinforces televisual self-referentiality. In an inversion of the process, the series analysed in this corpus attempt to contain the entire line-up.

At a time in which television is more self-referential than ever, creators are relying on television invariants as referents and endowing them with the same or even greater importance than traditional referents (literary, classical, biblical). The origin of thematic recurrences changes realm because they must fulfil their purpose: being recognisable to the audience.

Recurrence activates the pleasure of recognition in viewers, which is also its justification: the universes of recurrence and referentiality actively seek an easily identifiable, common social universe for their receptors. This explains the recent and gradual emergence of meta-televisual and audiovisual recurrence that has not yet replaced traditional literary, biblical, scholarly, thematic and mythical references and will probably never completely do so; instead, we should speak of mutations. Thematic and mythic recurrences are among the first to be established in the area of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs); thus, their survival is ensured.

One pillar of recurrence is the pleasure of recognition. Creators must be sure that audiences recognise the referents they use. The type of target reader (Echo 1986) can be inferred by the type of thematic references that shape a series. In *House*'s case, references to the Internet, video games, cartoons, comics and sports refer to a juvenile or teenage, almost geeky audience. That is why references evolve and vary over time, because one of their goals is to spark the pleasure of

recognition in accordance with narrative's consolatory purpose (Eco; Calabrese 1987: 53).

Thematic recurrence belongs to the plane of contents (meaning, concept, *mythos*) despite the inevitable stratification, since the updating of myths is a constant in the cultural tradition; the survival of form, to paraphrase Ginzburg, amounts to substantial evidence of meaning (Ginzburg 1989: 54). This process is equivalent to the perpetuation of myth through ritual (Dumézil 1970). Quantitatively, references, especially meta-television ones, belong to the signifier (plane of expression) because of their lack of signification.

Overall, the series of references make up, in Ryan's words (2005), a new space that is conditioned by the type of audience and conditions it, with undeniable consequences for collective imagery.

Both digital thematic specialisation as well as the multiplication and fragmentation of a theme that invades the television line-up should be related to television's current status as elements inherent to the meta-television that characterises television programming. The analysed series are fragmentary and stratified in terms of themes and references. Hybridisation and stratification through themes and formulas have been proven to work; they are one of the current systems of ideation. Television narration has become a repertoire of themes, myths and motifs fashioned on the basis of fragments, by strata.

In an age of audience fragmentation, the recurrent use of themes and myths is driven by the need to connect with a wide-ranging, heterogeneous public. The increasing number of American meta-television references that complement the growing use of recurrence is taking place in step with the rising Americanisation of the cable age. Myths and recurrent themes survive in ICTs.

Texts are constructed on the basis of fragments in a stratification not only of cultural standards, genres and themes, but also of very diverse reference sources. Intergenericity and interdiscursivity live side by side with self-referentiality in the audiovisual texts analysed.

Television has a final, culminating, agglutinating role in the transactions, flows and interrelations of the cultural atmosphere (Wallace 1990). The American TV series analysed borrow from fiction and non-fiction. *Lost*'s decision to opt for a handful of modern Swiss Family Robinsons is due to a certain socioeconomic, historical-cultural context that explains the weight of reason as the driver of change typical of myth, an exaltation of our technophile times in accordance with the dominant hypothesis of its own period. The bundles of themes and relationships established among them – mythemes – make up the text and its intertextual relationships (Lévi-Strauss 1969), yet not as ingredients of a concrete myth, but rather as ingredients of a television and thus, mythic narration (Silverstone 1981: 112).

The audience decodes the themes and myths in their complex, stratified organisation. Observing the ingredients and figurations present in a number of cultural products allows us to

note a series of similarities that can be classified into thematic, archetypal or mythic recurrences. Some of these recurrences – the three types encompassed in *thematic recurrence* terminology, since we are addressing the reappearance of narrative themes – lead us to the *mythos*, the generative matrix of concrete texts, abstract for each myth and not universalist (Duch 1995: 173). Hence, we observe the presence of myth as a way of understanding human beings in their social cohesion-seeking and legitimating function (see Tous 2004: 41).

Propp (1940) claimed that myths are not reliable reproductions of rites, but rather narrations that outlive their backgrounds. We believe that an understanding of recurrence – the reason why literary or cultural motifs continue to be present in the cultural tradition – will come from its origin as rite, myth and ritual (Dumézil 1970).

Notes

- 1 This article is based on the author's doctoral thesis entitled *El text audiovisual: anàlisi des d'una perspectiva mediològica* (Tous 2008), an analysis of the first season of the five American series mentioned.
- 2 Olson (1987, 1990) coined the term *meta-television*, which referred to the first cases of meta-television references in the 1980s.
- 3 Today's *golden age of drama* (Longworth 2000-2002) has two golden ages as precedents: the first is characterised by anthological series (1948-1956) and the second takes place in the 1980s and 90s, with series such as *Hill Street Blues* (NBC 1981-1987) and *ER* (NBC 1994-).
- 4 Understood as Gérard Genette's defined it in his book *Palimpsestes* (1982). See below.
- 5 We propose this term to refer to products customarily associated with the merchandising generated from a television series and advertised through the programme's official website, within an oligarchic market.
- 6 The project for a fourth spin-off, *CSI: London*, which was to star Clive Owen, was stillborn.
- 7 We interpret genre competition or visual genre experience as the fact that television viewers' newly acquired sophistication contributes to genre hybridisation processes, because of thematic saturation in earlier periods.
- 8 As examples of literary intertextual recurrence, *Lost* contains a host of references to *The Lord of the Flies*, *Moby Dick*, *Divine Comedy*, *Heart of Darkness*, *Robinson Crusoe* and *The Mysterious Island* etc.. The series also contains abundant religious and biblical references, such as: "And the meek shall inherit the Earth", New Testament, Matthew, Chap. 5, Verse 5. Sermon on the Mount, Beatitudes ("The Moth", 1.7). As an example of scholarly recurrence, the Latin quoted by Bartlet in *The West Wing*: ("He shall, from time to time", 1.12). An example of thematic recurrence is the use of the *doppelgänger* in *Desperate Housewives* (see the development of this point in the article).

- 9 A few illustrative examples of intra-episodic reference can be found in *CSI* in "Crate'n Burial" (1.3.) and "Grave danger" (5.23 and 5.24), which share the motif of a person buried alive who is freed by the team of forensic scientists; in *Lost*, in reference to another series, Hurley calls the policeman who takes Kate into custody shortly before he dies "Johnny Fever" from *WKRP Radio Cincinnati* (CBS 1978-1982) ("Tabula rasa", 1.3); again in *CSI*, reference to game shows: the homicide investigator, referring to how placidly the three brothers died: "You're watching *Wheel of Fortune* and..." ("35K O.B.O.", 1.18). One example of a musical reference in *The West Wing* is when Josh can't get Schubert's Ave Maria out of his head; he listens to it with CJ ("The Crackpots and These Women", 1.5.); in *CSI*, an example of a reference to advertising is when Catherine, not finding proof because of a serial killer's extreme pulchritude, refers to him as "Mr. Clean" ("The Strip Strangler", 1.23); an example of informative references in *House* are the allusions to the Axis of Evil: "House: But unless I've been named as the fourth part of the Axis of Evil..." ("Mob rules", 1.15). An example of cinema reference in *Desperate Housewives* are Bree and Rex's family dinners, very similar to those in *American Beauty*, dinners "with elevator music", as Jane says to Caroline, her mother, in *American Beauty* (pilot, "Impossible", 1.15). In *House*, an example of a reference to a cartoon and a comic is when House says to Foreman: "Look at your house and take Scooby with you" ("The Honeymoon", 1.22).
- 10 According to Missika (2006), institutional information is constituted by paleotelevision, "info-shows", neotelevision and fusion, post-television.
- 11 IMBERT, G., *El transformismo televisivo. Postelevisión e imaginarios sociales*. Madrid: Cátedra, 2008.
- 12 All the Best Cowboys Have Daddy Issues", 1.11.
- 13 "Blood Drop", 1.7. They exemplify the morphological typology with cases observed in *CSI: Las Vegas*.
- 14 "Boom", 1.13.
- 15 "Running to Stand Still", 1.6, and "Come Back to Me", 1.10, *Desperate Housewives*; "Change of Partners", *CSI*.
- 16 "Unfriendly Skies", 1.9.
- 17 "Evaluation Day", 1.22.
- 18 "Who Are You?", 1.6.
- 19 "Justice is Served", 1.21.
- 20 Contemporary audiovisual narrative, especially in the US, is characterised by genre hybridisation, subversion and crisis.
- 21 Cf. Steiner 1974.
- 22 Deirdre is the perfect partner for Mike and at the same time a drug addict who sells her own son and admits sexually blackmailing a policeman. Maisy Gibbons is an authoritarian mother at the strict school Bardcliff and Wisteria Lane's prostitute. In Maisy's case, the duality references the course and mystery of her double life. The reverse is true in Martha/Felicia's case: there are two identical people who develop different functions. They are so alike that they can be confused, like Les Sòsies and Menaechmi, the two characters in Plautus' comedies who were the source of the French words *sosie* and *ménechme*

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