

Myth and Subversion in the Contemporary Novel

International Conference
Universidad Complutense
Madrid (9-11 March, 2011)

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1. Presentation

The International Conference “Myth and Subversion in the Contemporary Novel” is organised by Amaltea: Journal of Myth Criticism (<http://www.ucm.es/info/amaltea/revista/revista.html>), the “Contemporary Myth Anthropology Research Project” (I+D+I Project, Ministry Ref. HUM2007/62226; <http://www.ucm.es/info/amaltea/inicio.html>) and the UCM-CAM Research Group “ACIS: Research in Myth Criticism” (Ref. 941730) (<http://www.ucm.es/info/amaltea/acis/inicio.html>). The Conference will take place on 9-11 March 2011 at the Faculty of Languages, Universidad Complutense de Madrid.

2. Scientific Objectives

The organising committee is aiming to bring together researchers who can contribute methodologies or practical approaches geared towards interpreting the subversion of myth both in contemporary novels and in contemporary art as related to the novel. Suitable approaches include theoretical considerations, textual analysis and analysis of artistic expressions.

Hereunder are the fundamental reasons that justify such a Conference, as well as its scientific objectives.

Either implicitly or explicitly, myths have always played an important role in the novel. Myth criticism attempts to identify them and interpret their function and meaning within text structures.

In the same way, subversion is a frequent resource for writers across all genres, although the novel’s versatility may account for the fact that this resource seems to have been exploited more often in this genre than in any other.

When myth and subversion are combined in contemporary novels, the result is extraordinarily appealing to university researchers and students. Among other possible reasons for this combination we could mention the predominance of positivist thought over mythic thought, a modified understanding of transcendence, or the search for new formal procedures that deviate from those typical of mythological discourse.

To these scientific, anthropological and linguistic reasons we could add the contemporary phenomenon of ephemeral mythical inflation: our societies are demonstrating an astounding capacity to create and destroy myths with incredible rapidity (film stars, sportspeople, luxury brands). The invasion of new myths inevitably entails their own subversion.

Some paradigmatic examples of this type of subversion: In *The Penelopiad: The Myth of Penelope and Odysseus*, Margaret Atwood reinterprets the *Odyssey* through the eyes of Penelope and her relationship to the twelve maids, while Jeanette Winterson's *Weight: The Myth of Atlas and Heracles* ridicules the machismo of war gods within a highly effectist space-and-time frame. John Fowles's *A Maggot* is a pastiche of several interpretations of the androgynous, and David Lodge's *Small World* undermines the religious overtones of Perceval's quest, with the hero Perse seeking beautiful Angelica via an endless round of academic conferences, and elderly professor Kingfisher caught in the middle of a quest for a UNESCO Chair of Literary Criticism. Michel Butor's *Second Thoughts* follows the journey of the mediocre character Delmont from Paris to Rome, and through it demythifies the greatness of the hero as depicted in Virgil's *Aeneid*. Perceval's quest in Chrétien de Troyes's *The Story of the Grail* is also subverted in Italo Calvino's *The Nonexistent Knight*, with a quest that ends in ironic failure. In Christa Wolf's *Medea*, the myth of the child-murdering princess is altered by the inclusion of new subversive characters. Mario Vargas Llosa's *Lituma en los Andes* is a parodic, vulgarised reading of the myth of Ariadne, Theseus and Dionysus. Gonzalo Torrente Ballester's *Don Juan* presents the sexual corruption of the eponymous hero by the Comendador. Cristina Iglesias's *Labyrinths* series extracts words, sentences and paragraphs from J.G. Ballard's *The Crystal World* and welds them into a sculpture that alters the foundations of the novel. In film, Mel Brooks's *Young Frankenstein* introduces multiple parodies and modulates the cinematic evolution of the famous monster all the way to a happy ending. But beyond simply pointing out these transformations of ancient, medieval and modern myths, Conference delegates are asked to analyse the processes, function and meaning of the subversions, as well as to delve into the malleability of subverted myths and their capacity to regenerate contemporary literature.

There is not yet a definite and unified methodology to study and describe the processes of subversion that myths undergo in contemporary culture. Extensive research is still needed to bring concrete solutions to these questions. In practical terms, a definite theoretical framework will be highly useful to understand and interpret a great amount of post-modern writing, as well as the culture of our contemporary society.

The Conference will be markedly interdisciplinary, as participants will include researchers in other art forms, especially painting, sculpture, drawing, film, music, opera and dance. Their contributions will underline the contemporary novel's protean and multiform nature, which is entirely open to all kinds of artistic subversion of myth narratives.

The Conference, as in the previous occasion, will be international. It will be publicized on various mailing lists for humanities research across some twenty countries in Europe, and North and South America. Papers included in the Proceedings will be published by a European label with wide international distribution.

The thematic scope of the Conference will be the reception of ancient, medieval and modern myths in contemporary literature and art, from 1900 to today. There will be several thematic areas:

a. The process of contemporary demythification

Greek and Roman, medieval, modern or contemporary myths are being continuously revised, but under very different aspects from those that gave rise to them originally. Thus, one thematic area will centre on the contemporary tendency to empty myths of their original thematic and explanatory content, as well as on the different ways in which contemporary culture and post-modern writing provide new content to substitute for the original one.

b. Ephemeral mythical inflation

To the traditional mythical stock we now need to add the rapidly-appearing myths which are largely created by film and other mass media. These new myths, and new mythified objects, gradually make their way into the novel

form, but they are also limited by a short lifespan. A second thematic focus will therefore be the typology of such short-lived myths, their relationship with traditional myths, and the conditions of their endurance and extinction.

c. Forms of mythical subversion in the arts

An indisputably all-devouring genre, the novel does not only subsume poetic, dramatic or essayistic forms. Indeed, more and more often the novel form is seen to interact with the arts in general. The Conference will also focus on mythic subversion in novels which arise from pre-existent art, and in art which arises from pre-existent novels, as well as on how this subversion plays off and generates meaning in the relationship between art and literature.

These thematic areas will define the distribution of sessions in the Conference. Each session will include three speakers and one chair. Each speaker will be allotted 30 minutes for their paper, and at the end of the three papers there will be 30 minutes for discussion. The two plenary sessions at the beginning and end of the Conference will be undertaken by two internationally-renowned researchers in myth criticism: Prof. Robert Segal (United Kingdom) and Prof. Véronique Gély (France).

3. Organisation

3.1. Scientific Committee

Anna Clara Bova (University of Bari, Italy)

María Caballero (University of Seville, Spain)

Carlos García Gual (U. Complutense, Madrid, Spain)

Véronique Gély (University of Paris-Sorbonne, France)

Jan Herman (K.U. Leuven, Belgium)

Benedikts Kalnacs (University of Riga, Latvia)

Françoise Lavocat (University of Paris-Diderot, France)

José Antonio Millán (U. Complutense, Madrid, Spain)

Carmen Morenilla (University of Valencia, Spain)

Robert Segal (University of Aberdeen, United Kingdom)
Marta Teixeira Anacleto (University of Coimbra, Portugal)

3.2. General Coordinator

José Manuel Losada Goya (U. Complutense, Madrid, Spain)

3.3. Organising Committee (UCM)

Guadalupe Arbona Abascal (Spanish Literature)

Elena Blanch (Fine Arts)

Aurora Conde Muñoz (Italian Philology)

Arno Gimber (German Philology)

M^a Luisa Guerrero Alonso (French Philology)

Ana Isabel Jiménez San Cristóbal (Classics)

Félix Martín (English Philology)

Fernando Presa González (Slavic Philology)

3.4. Administration

Marta Guirao. mguirao@cesfelipesecondo.com

4. Registration and call for papers

The working languages for the Conference will be English, Spanish, French, German, and Italian.

The Proceedings will be exclusively published in English and Spanish.

4.1. Call for Papers

Those wishing to present a paper at the Conference, are asked to fill out and send the following pre-registration form (available at <http://www.ucm.es/info/amaltea/docsweb/ficha.doc>) to the e-mail address mguirao@cesfelipesecondo.com. The deadline for proposals is **30th October 2010**.

The organising committee will be in touch with all candidates before **16th November**, in order to communicate the scientific committee's decision on their proposal. Once a proposal is accepted, the candidate is required to register before **1st December 2010**. Registration instructions will be sent out with the acceptance e-mail. Numbers are limited.

4.2. Registration Fees

There are two modes of registration; in both cases the conference fee should be paid into the following account: IBAN ES65 - 0065-0198-30-0001023000 (BIC o SWIFT: BARCESMM; Barclays Bank). The account holder is J.M. Losada (Amaltea), and the subject should be 'Registration - Myth and Subversion Conference':

a) Speakers: 80 €

b) Students and other delegates: 25 € (registration deadline: **24 Feb. 2011**).

A certificate of attendance will be provided.

The official conference dinner will be held on Friday 11th of March. Those wishing to attend should book their place (mguirao@cesfelipesecondo.com) before **March 1st**. The price of the dinner is 35 €, payable on arrival at the Conference.