

Myth and Subversion in the Contemporary Novel

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in the Contemporary Novel

Edited by

José Manuel Losada Goya
and Marta Guirao Ochoa

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P U B L I S H I N G

Myth and Subversion in the Contemporary Novel,
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PREFACE

The essays in this volume address the developments of myth subversion in the contemporary novel. Parodic, analogical or metaphoric construction modulates myth, while the suppression of original elements, or the incorporation of others, into the inherited mythic text, raise questions about lacunae in the mythic story. Narrative inversion of any kind brings on the disruption of the original physical and moral referents. Nevertheless, myth lives on, mostly thanks to its inalterable qualities of versatility and flexibility, which enable its adaptation to the conditions of present society. *The Crying of Lot 49*, *Historias del Kronen*, *City of Glass*, *Joseph und seine Brüder*, *Los premios...* these novels, and all those studied herein, subvert inherited ancient, medieval and modern myths, and illustrate the birth of new mythologies as well as the versatile character of traditional myths, a species ever in danger of extinction.

* * *

These essays are a selection from over two hundred presented by scholars from 25 countries for the international conference on “Myth and Subversion in the Contemporary Novel,” which took place at the Universidad Complutense de Madrid (March 9-11, 2011). The five languages of the conference (English, Spanish, French, German, and Italian) have been reduced to two in this printed version.

The editors wish to express our gratitude to the members of ACIS, Research Group on Myth Criticism, the members of *Amaltea*. *Journal of Myth Criticism* (www.ucm.es/info/amaltea), those of Asteria. International Association of Myth Criticism (www.asteria-association.org) and to the teaching staff of the Departments of Philology, Media Studies, and Fine Arts, as well as the Centro de Estudios Superiores Felipe II, at the Universidad Complutense. We would like to extend our gratitude most especially to Esther Navío Castellano for her work in the revision and formatting of the text.

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José Manuel Losada Goya
Marta Guirao Ochoa
Autumn 2011

PREFACIO

Los artículos de este volumen abordan los derroteros seguidos por la subversión de los mitos en la novela contemporánea. La construcción paródica, analógica o metafórica modula el mito. La supresión o la incorporación de motivos literarios lo pone a prueba. La inversión de elementos originales trastoca sus referentes. Sin embargo, el mito sobrevive gracias a sus cualidades inalienables: versatilidad y flexibilidad. *The Crying of Lot 49*, *Historias del Kronen*, *City of Glass*, *Joseph und seine Brüder*, *Los premios*... las novelas estudiadas subvierten los mitos heredados, antiguos, medievales y modernos, reflejan el nacimiento de una nueva mitología y el carácter versátil del mito, especie siempre en peligro de extinción.

* * *

Estos artículos son una selección de los más de 200 enviados por investigadores de 25 países al congreso internacional “Mito y subversión en la novela contemporánea” organizado en la Universidad Complutense de Madrid (9-11 de marzo de 2011). Las lenguas del congreso (inglés, español, francés, alemán e italiano) han sido aquí reducidas a dos.

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La organización del congreso se ha beneficiado de dos ayudas ministeriales: el Proyecto de investigación I+D+i “Antropología mítica contemporánea” (ref. HUM2007/62226), del Ministerio Español de Educación y Ciencia, y la Acción complementaria “Mito y subversión en la novela contemporánea” (ref. FFI2010-08816-E), del Ministerio Español de Ciencia e Innovación.

José Manuel Losada Goya
Marta Guirao Ochoa
Otoño de 2011

PART I:

INTRODUCTION TO MYTH CRITICISM: PRELIMINARY REFLECTIONS

CHAPTER ONE

THE SUBVERSIVE TRIAD: A THEORETICAL APPROACH

JOSÉ MANUEL LOSADA GOYA

“To subvert” is a transitive verb: it requires an object, which in linguistics is called a referent. An ordinary example: subversion enacted by the avant-garde. With reference to traditional systems of knowledge, Surrealism proposes a liberation from all logical and moral constrictions, and what is habitually accepted as reality is subverted in favor of another, marvellous, “super-reality.”

Ordinarily, subversion is carried out with an end in mind. Using our current example: Surrealism seeks to recover the original powers of the spirit, which it considers lost in a bourgeois society (cf. Breton 1969, 37, 97; 1992, 231).

In theory, subversion is universal: anything can be overturned, not only in the material domain, but also particularly in the spiritual one: subversion is an eminently moral act. Indeed, if subversion were not possible, the freedom of the human mind would stand in doubt. Even when subversion is materially represented, it owes its true value to the spiritual derivative. Goya’s *Capricho* engraving *Tú que no puedes* (*You Who Cannot*) portrays two donkeys mounted on two men: a subversion of a means of transport, and a lesson about human foolishness.

It would seem that there are some exceptions to the universal nature of subversion. It is said, for example, that the phenomenon of fashion does not readily adhere to the dialectic of subversion. Baudrillard asserts that no referent exists that is able to contradict fashion: its referent is itself. In this sense, any hypothetical subversion or “modification” of fashion (*la mode*) itself makes fashion, and so is also fashion (Baudrillard 1976, 150-151). Pure smoke and mirrors: even if the referent is immanent in fashion in general, the subversion of each particular fashion is imposed like a force of autotelic resistance. An example: the original holes in blue jeans come to be replaced by other, no less original decorative innovations. It happens

with fashion as with contemporaneity: in always seeking to break with tradition, each is, paradoxically, thereby instating a tradition of breaking. Thus everything is susceptible to subversion, even fashion.

Our present problem is to study the subversive relationship that exists between myth and the contemporary novel. Using an analytical approach, I will first illustrate the primary aspects of myth subversion, then its connection to the novel; finally, its formidable expansion in the present.

1. The Subversion of Myth

Having defined subversion, I will now proceed to give a personal definition of myth: a relatively simple oral narrative of an extraordinary event with a transcendent and personal referent, theoretically lacking historical evidence and comprising a ritual, a series of constant components, and a conflictive, functional, and etiological nature.¹

The subversion of myth can affect three different factors:

a) the oral narrative and its subsequent versions, on one hand, or the intrigue and conflictive character on the other: the narrative dimension of the myth.

b) the relatively simple narration, on the one hand, or the ritual and series of constituent components on the other: the structure of the myth.

c) the extraordinary event with a transcendent and personal referent, on one hand, and its functional and etiological nature on the other: the dogmatic dimension of the myth.

The subversion of these factors causes a triad of subversions according to certain modalities. I will term the first modality of subversion “narrative,” the second, “structural,” and the third, “transcendental” One cannot ignore the artificial quality of this division; logically, some elements can operate simultaneously in various modalities, and any of these modalities of subversion affects the others in some fashion. Despite

¹ A few clarifications are needed here: myth is an oral, symbolic, evolutionary and apparently simple account (in the sense of a tale, a diegesis, or a series of narrative and representative actions) of an extraordinary experience or event with a transcendental and personal referent that shows social classification. Considered, in principle, as bereft of historical testimony, myth is composed by a series of constant or invariable cultural semantic elements which can be reduced to themes, and is endowed with a conflictive (it invariably contains a trial or ordeal), functional character (understood as the transmission of common values and beliefs, and the provision of factual schemata of rites and actions) and etiological nature (expressing in some way a particular or universal cosmogony or eschatology).

these objections, however, the methodological convenience of this division recommends its use.

Now I will proceed to examine these three types of subversion (narrative, structural and transcendental).

a) At the foundation of the reasons of narrative subversion one finds the saturation of academic formality. The classical ideal of form survives surprisingly well throughout the centuries, reaching its apogee in the eighteenth century. According to Winckelmann, the Greeks arrived at an ideal of beauty that surpassed the naturally-occurring. In an image, the artist was obligated to respect these classic rules in order to achieve perfection (Robador 2005, 45-55; Becq 1994, 520-521). It should not be surprising, then, that obedience of such an ironclad regulation not only brings artistic sterility, but also a long succession of rebellions, some more tentative, others manifest, against the classicist mandate. The history of art and literature is filled with subversions of inherited narrative forms.

One might give an example from the Renaissance. In Rabelais's *Gargantua*, six men return from Nantes, where they have prayed to Saint Sebastian for release from the plague. Having learned where they have come from, Friar Jean warns them of the havoc that the monks of that place could wreak in their homes while they are away. This text is interesting for our case:

[...] in came the monk, very resolute, and asked them, Whence are you, you poor wretches? Of Saint Genou, said they. And how, said the monk, does the Abbot Gulligut, the good drinker,—and the monks, what cheer make they? By G— body, they'll have a fling at your wives, and breast them to some purpose, whilst you are upon your roaming rant and gadding pilgrimage. Hin, hen, said Sweer-to-go, I am not afraid of mine, for he that shall see her by day will never break his neck to come to her in the night-time. Yea, marry, said the monk, now you have hit it. Let her be as ugly as ever was Proserpina, she will once, by the Lord G—, be overturned, and get her skin-goat shaken, if there dwell any monks near to her; for a good carpenter will make use of any kind of timber. Let me be peppered with the pox, if you find not all your wives with child at your return; for the very shadow of the steeple of an abbey is fruitful² (Rabelais 2004, 134).

² “[...] entra le Moyne tout délibéré, & leur demanda: Dont êtes-vous, vous autres, pauvres hères? De Saint Genou, dirent-ils. Et comment (dit le Moyne) se porte l’abbé Tranchelion, le bon beuveur? Et les moynes, quelle chère font-ils? Le cor dieu, ils biscotent vos femmes, ce pendant que êtes en romivage. Hin, hen! (dit Lasdaller) je n’ai pas peur de la mienne. Car qui la verra de jour, ne se rompra pas le col pour l’aller visiter la nuit! C’est (dit le Moyne) bien rentré de picques! elle

The mention of the repulsive Proserpina, as well as blasphemies and exclamations about venereal disease, the metaphors of horseback riding (in the original text), physical labor, and fertilization, are typical elements of grotesque inversion. Rabelais utilizes them to subvert the miracle tales so common in his period. The mockery and lexical bulimia serve the primary movement of the text: to raise that which is below, to lower the elevated, and generally to subvert the order of things.

There is no lack of similar subversions in the following centuries. Here I will mention another three illustrative examples from the sphere of French literature: the *Histoire comique de Francion*, by Sorel (1623-1633) offers us, in an abundance of extravagant episodes, an example of an anti-novel; *Les Bijoux indiscrets*, by Diderot (1747), ostentatiously parodies the novelistic form of the erotic pseudo-Oriental tale; and *Germinal*, by Zola (1885), replaces romantic sentiment with inheritance and environment as the determining factors of his characters.

b) Structural subversion demands the dismemberment of one or several of the structuring elements of the text's arrangement. The fundamental nature of these elements explains the irreparable consequences of such an operation: the text loses its identity and its message. Chivalry, errantry, love, and madness, as Cervantes arrays them, form a constituent part of the character Don Quixote; the suppression of any one of these components in the structure seriously threatens the integrity of its arrangement.

Narrative subversion and structural subversion go, it has been said, "hand in hand." They both simultaneously pervert the literary canon and the ideological canon of reference. A parody of the novel of giants, of the juridical essay, and the *chansons de geste*, *Gargantua* subverts the motif of pilgrimages and of faith in the miraculous virtue of relics. Something similar occurs in the examples from French novels: the anti-novel *Francion* imparts a syncretistic wisdom, the story *Bijoux* maintains an anti-absolutist political statement, and the novel *Germinal* posits the imminent arrival of laborers' rights. Increasingly over the years, this liberation from traditional literary forms entails the abandonment of inherited contents.

c) Yet there is a difference between the text of *Gargantua* and these others: its criticism of saint processions and of miracles presupposes a referent that does not appear in Sorel, Diderot, or Zola: transcendence. The

pourrait être aussi laide que Proserpine, elle aura, par dieu, la saccade, puisqu'il y a moynes autour. Car un bon ouvrier met indifféremment toutes pièces en œuvre. Que j'aie la vérole, en cas que ne les trouviez engrossées à votre retour. Car seulement l'ombre du clocher d'une abbaye est féconde" (Rabelais 1994, 223). Also see the analysis by M. Bakhtin (1968).

famous image of the fertile abbey is a warning of the threat of the monastery near the homes of the pilgrims. It is true that the text does not fully question true faith, but instead the abuses of superstition. It is no less true that the text condemns the ingenuous pilgrims' belief in the virtues of the procession to the saint, as well as in the relics, elements that they have mythicized. Mythic subversion, then, affects the transcendent condition of an object, whether through imitation, adaptation, modification by suppression, or by incorporation and inversion. Resorting to grotesque inversion, where the topography of the lower parts of the body gains advantage over that of the upper parts, subverts the value of narrative, structural, and mythological elements.

Transcendental subversion is also often called mythic subversion or demythologization, insofar as a transcendent and etiological character are elements unique to myth in literature. The loss of one expositive style or another might be innocuous to a mythic narrative, but the loss of its transcendent character would prove lethal.

The operation of mythic subversion does not emerge in the grotesque novel of the Renaissance or in the Middle Ages. In fact, ancient Greece provides clear examples of this sort of demythologization. The apogee of Ionic rationalism plays a leading role in a long period of corrosive criticism of mythology; it is sufficient to remember that the term "fiction" as applied to myths emerges in this period. The arbitrary decisions of the gods are the center of the rationalist critiques: a god cannot be unjust, immoral, or vengeful. Thales and Xenophanes reject the materiality and anthropomorphism of the gods of Homer; Anaximander, their existence. These critiques of mythological traditions continue through the Alexandrian rhetors, particularly Aelius Theon. Later, the Stoics such as Chrysippus or Heraclitus would reduce the Greek gods to physical or ethical principles.

The work of Euhemerus (forth and third centuries B.C.) is often considered the paragon of demythologization. His *Sacred History*, which has been preserved thanks to Ennius and Lactantius, is a sort of philosophical voyage. Euhemerus claims to have found the origin of the gods: they are ancient kings, divinized. In his time, it was the only rational possibility of preserving the Homeric gods—giving them a historical (prehistoric) reality, since the author asserts the reality of these kings whose memory survives, mythologized, in the imagination of the people. A relevant example is the dethronement of Saturn:

Then, after these things, they say that an oracle was given to Saturn, bidding him to take heed lest his son should expel him from the kingdom; that he, for the sake of weakening the oracle and avoiding the danger, laid

an ambush for Jupiter to kill him; that Jupiter, having learnt of the plot, claimed the kingdom for himself afresh, and banished Saturn; and that he, when he had been tossed over all lands, followed by armed men whom Jupiter had sent to seize or put him to death, scarcely found a place of concealment in Italy³ (Lactantius 2007, 26).

Never would such hirelings, even by Jupiter's orders, dare to persecute the god of agriculture unless his godliness were fallacious. The Christian apologists hardly needed further evidence of the humanity, that is to say, the nonexistence, of the Greek gods (Eliade 1963, 184-193).

2. Mythic Subversion and the Novel

Subverted from its beginnings, myth, on the contrary, can subvert neither structures nor contents. Mythic subversion is always passive. From this point of view, to speak of myth and subversion alone is impracticable: we must find the agent of subversion.

It is not insignificant that most mythological subversion has flourished in the prose of novels. Here, again, narrative and structural reasons concur. Far from the classical constrictions on character, tone, and length, the novel happily lends itself to the deconstruction of essential elements of myth. The versatility of the genre deserves special attention for this reason. In Rabelais's text, the episode in Chapter 43 reintroduces characters who appeared and were "devoured" in Chapter 36, without other unrelated adventures (such as the skirmish of Picrocholeto) doing any damage to the ultimate subversive purpose. The novelistic prose allows the free inversion of forms and subjects. This narrative and structural subversion also brings transcendent subversion: beyond the comic content transmitted in the logorrhoea of Friar Jean and beyond the satirical image proposed in the inversion of the body, the text of Rabelais "demythologizes" a popular belief, divesting the custom of pilgrimages of its religious dimension.

As a non-canonical genre, the novel contributes without misgivings to the subversion of the narrative, structural, and mythic canon. More so than poetry and theatre, the novel is especially qualified to carry out the subversion of myth. All-consuming par excellence, and liberated, because of its bastard origin, from the dominant etiquette of canonical genres, the novel, from the moment of its birth, has undertaken an intrigue upon the thought, objective, and traditional model of myths.

³ One can assume that Ennius adapted Euhemerus' work into Latin; almost all the text of Euhemerus that Ennius uses has been transmitted via Lactantius.

One must acknowledge, nonetheless, that mythic subversion in the pre-contemporary novel is disproportionate to narrative and structural subversion. It appears that myths run through the cultural ages of the West subjected to a moderately progressive subversive process. A centrifugal force separates them from their original identity, to which a centripetal force attracts them. Not even does the modern, post-Enlightenment novel show a universal rejection of myth: after the Romantic novel, which recovers medieval myths, comes the fantastic novel, which utilizes various mythic elements; the realist novel, which formulates them with the aim of literary objectivism; and the naturalist novel, which, although it rejects them in form, essentially adapts them, and even creates new ones in the name of science. It all happens as if the subversive faculty of the novel were not enough to operate the universal subversion of myths.

3. Mythic Subversion, Novel and Contemporaneity

In fact, there is yet a third variable for completing the subversive equation: Contemporaneity. Myth is shown to have at least one flank that is open to subversion, and the novel is by nature subversive, but myth does not appear to be subverted in the novel in a systematic fashion in the Contemporary age. Keeping in step with the progressive and radical modification of contemporary thought, the novel ultimately breaks the tension which dictated a moderate progression of the subversive process. It is only starting in the contemporary age that the break with the mythic tradition definitively materializes. This process is not instantaneous, but is radically progressive: from Modernism to post-Modernism, novel and myth enter into a collision which is resolved in the process of mythic subversion.

This does not imply the disappearance of myths: the nineteenth and twentieth centuries continue to include them in their fictions. Nor does it suppose the disappearance of reactionary novels resistant to subversion: the exception proves the rule. However, it must be noted that there is an incontestable change: in the contemporary novel the subversion of myth has become spontaneous and natural.

It is not easy to determine the elements of contemporary mentality which trigger transcendental subversion. The history of literature has noted the role of literary schools and movements in renovating forms and thought. Innovation follows innovation because of saturation: the human mind can become accustomed to any reality, and seeks a change which gives it the feeling of being alive, even if imaginarily so. This is the sentiment expressed in the words of welcome with which Baudelaire

endows his *Salon de 1845* ("l'avènement du neuf"), or in Pound's famed exclamation, "Make it new!"

Myths are not entirely exempted from this generational renovation. But their apparently simple structure and their reference to transcendence form a considerable resistance to the assaults of schools and movements. In general, ancient, medieval, and modern myths only allow peripheral formal modifications: a change of language or style, of coordinates in space and time, of the names of characters, of the marginal intrigues in the plot, etc. Even though it is set in Flanders and its protagonist is a descendent of Miguel Mañara who is repentant of his errors, Mérimée's *Les Âmes du purgatoire* (1834) is still a novelized version of the Don Juan myth which preserves its invariable elements.⁴ This type of formalistic subversion, the most frequently used, has remained so from the earlier part of modernity up to today: Delteil's *Don Juan* (1930) takes his depravity and repentance to an extreme, but still he is following the path of the seducer who defies even the heavens. This type of remodeling of myth, irrefutably, is a mythic subversion of the first type, or narrative: it affects the myth only insofar as it enters into coexistence with textual narration. Narrative subversion is relative, and it only incites an indirect disturbance of the myth.

The second type of subversion, structural, is also relative, but it causes a deeper revolution in the framework of the myth. In *L'Emploi du temps* (1956), Michel Butor describes the suffering of Jacques Revel in an imaginary city, where he is carrying out a job by correspondence for his company. The various parts, series, and voices of the employee's quest around the city send us back to another quest, Theseus' efforts against the Minotaur in the labyrinth of Crete. The detective case and the mythic referent are of lesser importance than the questioning of truth and of the art of writing, which is not based so much in facts as in the fluctuating relationship between things and events. Similarly to Rabelais, who inverts inherited form and structure grotesquely in favor of a satirical verbiage, the structure of myth is removed in favor of the new, unstable truth, produced by writing. Myth has been transformed into a "hypotext" whose

⁴ In theatre, myth is even more contrary to structural subversion. Could there be a Don Juan without the Commander? The examples of Nicolas Lenau, Max Frisch, and Henry de Montherlant offer a Commander reduced to inanimate stone, smoke, and a giant puppet with a person inside respectively, but this very presence *in absentia* is itself functional. Even in contemporary theatre, the Don Juan myth seems to demand this invariable element. One can say the same of poetry: despite its parodic character and its placement in the Orient, Byron's *Don Juan* does not allow for structural variations of importance.

mechanism is adapted to the new text; once it is used, myth can be discarded. This type of subversion does not eschew myth, precisely: without myth it would be impossible to understand the text, yet after its initial inclusion it becomes irrelevant. Its transcendent power is not negated; it is instead reused for the text's narrative and structure. Myth has thus come to be another discursive element within the text.

Beyond the assaults of literary schools and movements, myths face an earthquake which has its origin in much more profound causes: the degeneration of classical epistemology. This epistemology proposes a mindset oriented towards a canon: static, hierarchical, and apparently definitive (Gusdorf 1976, 411). Epistemological subversion, a phenomenon of the present age, produces a slippage of grounds which breaks the foundations of traditional myths (Durand 1996, 29). Subversion of the third type, or transcendental, which includes epistemology, is absolute: it implies, besides narrative and structural inversion, the disappearance of any transcendental dimension from the myth. In other subversions, this dimension was not necessarily accepted, but it did exist textually as an entity superior to the characters, as a possible existence beyond the panorama of human relations. In this subversion, the transcendent dimension is trivialized for the sake of an end ordinarily considered inferior. Myth is not attacked now; it is merely treated frivolously. Its weight of transcendence is handled with a different aim from its original one. This type of mythic subversion is common in the novel of the last few decades. Perceval continues his search, not of the Grail but of a woman (David Lodge, *Small World*, 1984), and vampires still survive on blood, but they are freed from their ties to the demonic (Stephenie Meyer, *Twilight*, 2007). It is worth stressing that this subversion is not limited to the novel. In the fine arts, for example, statues of the Cyclops Polyphemus have been erected, but their visitors can tour his entrails without fear (Jean Tinguely and Niki de Saint Phalle, *Le Cyclop*, 1969-94). In the world of socio-cultural research, Sleeping Beauties are portrayed, but these are simulacra of sports stars (Sam Taylor-Wood, *Beckham, the Sleeping Beauty*, 2004).

In these and so many other cases, the scholar encounters a new manner of viewing myth. They find themselves impelled to reinvent myth criticism. Today's myth no longer fits easily into that definition which was offered in the introduction of this article: it has lost its quality of an extraordinary event with a transcendent referent, it does have historical evidence, it presents variable components, and it does not attempt to give any explanation of the world whatsoever. The myth of traditional mythology exists and will continue to exist, but it must learn to live with

the new contemporary myth. This myth is a reflection of three basic elements in our society: social globalization, ideological immanence, and the “logic” of consumerism. Myths are now born and developed in conjunction with traditional and modern means of communication; they are perceived as ephemeral phenomena, and are exploited as needed in function with the interests of the market. Literary criticism has much to learn from sociology, anthropology, and economics if it truly wants to reestablish a valid myth criticism capable of understanding today’s world.

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(SPANISH VERSION)

LA TRÍADA SUBVERSIVA:
UN ACERCAMIENTO TEÓRICO

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Subvertir es un verbo transitivo: requiere un objeto lingüísticamente denominado referente. Un ejemplo habitual: la subversión de las vanguardias. Respecto a los sistemas tradicionales de conocimiento, el surrealismo propone una liberación de todas las constricciones lógicas y morales, la realidad habitualmente aceptada es subvertida en favor de otra, maravillosa, denominada superrealidad:

Habitualmente se subvierte con un fin. Retomemos el ejemplo: el surrealismo persigue la recuperación de los poderes originales del espíritu, que considera perdidos en una sociedad burguesa (cf. Breton 1969, 37, 97 y 1992, 231).

En principio, la subversión es universal: todo puede ser trastocado. No solo en el terreno material, sino de modo particular en el espiritual: la subversión es un acto eminentemente moral. Si la subversión no fuera posible, quedaría en entredicho la libertad de la mente humana. Aun cuando la subversión se represente materialmente, debe su valor auténtico a la derivada espiritual. El capricho de Goya *Tú que no puedes* representa dos burros montados sobre dos hombres: subversión de un medio de transporte, y lección sobre la imbecilidad humana.

Parece que existen algunas excepciones al carácter universal de la subversión. Se diría, por ejemplo, que el fenómeno de la moda es reactio a la dialéctica de la subversión. Afirma Baudrillard que no hay ningún referente capaz de contradecir a la moda: su referente es ella misma. En este sentido, cualquier hipotética subversión o “modificación” de la moda hace moda, es también moda (1976, 150-151). Puro espejismo: aunque el referente sea inmanente a la moda general, la subversión de cada moda particular se impone como una fuerza de resistencia autotélica. Un

ejemplo: los originales agujeros de los pantalones vaqueros están llamados a ser sustituidos por otros aditamentos no menos originales. Pasa con la moda como con la modernidad, siempre persiguiendo la ruptura con la tradición pero, paradójicamente, instaurando la tradición de la ruptura. Todo es susceptible de subversión, incluso la moda.

El problema ahora es indagar en la relación subversiva existente entre el mito y la novela contemporánea. Siempre de modo analítico, expondré primero los principales aspectos de la subversión mítica, después, su sintonía con la novela y, finalmente, su formidable expansión en la contemporaneidad.

1. Subversión mítica

Definida la subversión, doy una definición personal de mito: relato oral y relativamente sencillo de un acontecimiento extraordinario con un referente trascendental y personal, en principio privado de testimonio histórico y dotado de un ritual, una serie de componentes constantes y un carácter conflictivo, funcional y etiológico¹.

La subversión del mito puede afectar a tres factores:

- a) al relato oral y sus versiones subsiguientes, por un lado, o a la intriga y el carácter conflictivo por otro, es decir, a la dimensión narrativa del mito.
- b) a la composición relativamente sencilla, por un lado, o al ritual y la serie de componentes constantes por otro, es decir, a la estructura del mito.
- c) al acontecimiento extraordinario con referente trascendente y personal, por un lado, o al carácter funcional y etiológico por otro, es decir, a la dimensión dogmática del mito.

¹ Esta definición impone algunas precisiones: relato (en el sentido de historia, diégesis o sucesión de acciones tanto narrativas como representativas) oral, simbólico, evolutivo y aparentemente sencillo de un acontecimiento o de una experiencia extraordinarios con referente trascendental y personal, que evidencia una clasificación social, carece en principio de testimonio histórico, se compone de una serie de elementos constantes o invariantes semánticas culturales reducibles a temas y está dotado de un carácter conflictivo (supone una prueba), funcional (transmite valores y creencias comunes, provee de esquemas fácticos, ritos y acciones) y etiológico (expresa de algún modo una cosmogonía o escatología, particular o universal).