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NEW MYTHOLOGY

By *Micaela Latini*

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It. *Nuova Mitologia*; Fr. *Nouvelle mythologie*; Germ. *Neue Mythologie*; Span. *Nueva mitología*. New mythology or mythology of reason: debate on the need for philosophical ideas to become aesthetic, i.e. mythological as well.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

It is an anonymous fragment, allegedly written between the years 1796-97 (discovered only in 1913 by the German philosopher Franz Rosenzweig) and attributed to the pen and the efforts of Hegel, Hölderlin and Schelling, that christens the concept of "new mythology". It is the text called *Das älteste Systemprogramm des deutschen Idealismus* (*The Oldest Systematic Program of German Idealism*): with this title, the *feuilleton* found by Franz Rosenzweig was destined to launch a debate of great importance around the German Romanticism and to raise the question of the mythological dimension in all its aporeticity. Aim of this text, at least in its aesthetic meaning, is to give back to aesthetic (i.e. mythological) ideas their citizenship certificate and rehabilitate them in their philosophical value. In this context the project of a "mythology of reason" takes shape: a mythology that feeds on philosophical ideas and stands alongside reason. In the same years, a short essay by the German intellectual Johann Gottfried Herder, entitled *Iduna, oder der Apfel der Verjüngung* (*Iduna, or the Apple of Rejuvenation*), appeared in Schiller's journal "Die Horen" (and in the form of a response to the theses of the same editor-in-chief). The text – whose preliminary outline can already be found in an essay of 1766 entitled *Vom neuern Gebrauch der Mythologie* (*On the New Use of Mythology*) – is based on the dialogue between two interlocutors, each one championing an opposite position regarding Nordic mythology, and in general regarding the rehabilitation of myth. Herder's call for a 'new mythology' was assumed by Friedrich Schlegel who, in his *Rede über die Mythologie* (*Speech on Mythology*, 1800), argued that human reason needs the figures of poetry and that mythology must trace its generating nucleus back to reason. These theses closely resemble the positions expressed 1856 by Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, who entrusts the new mythology with the task of being an intermediary between philosophy and poetry (see Schelling 1989). The goal was to highlight another kind

of reason that would be synthetic as opposed to the analytic one that dominated the Enlightenment. Through the Romantics and the German Idealists (Herder, Schelling, Hegel, Hölderlin, Creuzer), the question of the new mythology progresses 1872 with Nietzsche (see Nietzsche 2008), for whom myth is the creative force of every civilization. With W. F. Otto, on the other hand, the mythological question is characterized in an aesthetic-religious sense.

THE CONTEMPORARY DEBATE

The question of a pragmatic interplay of myth and philosophy, aimed at laying the foundations of a "culture" based on consensus, survived until the 20th century. In the new scenario, the question of the new mythology represents the very apex of an interdisciplinary reflection that began, especially in Germany, at the end of the 1960s. The debate on the new philosophy developed along two lines. On the one hand, as a side effect of the (post)theological discourse on demythologization (*Entmythologisierung*) (Bultmann 1984), and, on the other, in terms of an "aesthetic-poetological" reflection on myth in literature and philosophy (Fuhrmann, 1971; Poser, 1979). More interesting developments have occurred with the theses of *Dialektik der Aufklärung, 1947 (Dialectics of Enlightenment)* by Horkheimer and Adorno (2002), investigating modern instrumental rationality. Another fundamental stage in the debate on the new mythology – parallel to the systematic rediscovery of authors such as Ernst Cassirer, Carl Gustav Jung, Karl Jaspers and Ernst Bloch (the four great "mythologists" of this century) – was marked by the works of Blumenberg and Kofakowski. Against the re-presentation of the myth as an original datum (see Otto 1962), Blumenberg in his book *Work on Myth (Arbeit am Mythos)* focuses on the internal tension between mythologization and demythologization that characterizes the very emergence of the mythical phenomenon (Blumenberg 1979). Finally, in 1983, a large collection of essays edited by Karl Heinz Bohrer (1983) appeared in Germany, in which an attempt was made to explicitly take stock of the aesthetic and philosophical "potential" of myth without, however, resorting to its apologia and official sanction. However, alternative paths also emerge, such as those outlined by Frank (2004), and Habermas (in Bohrer, 1983). In France, the revival of the mythological question was canonized by Barthes' successful volume *Mythologies, 1957* (Barthes 1972), which analyses the issue in semiotic terms. By relaunching the centrality of myth, or more precisely of "mythologies" as potential discourses of the Modern, a dense debate has developed on the theoretical meaning of the (re)foundation of a new mythology. The central point of this debate is the necessity of re-evaluating the anthropological impact and the ontological necessity of mythologies without being reduced to a mere instrument of unilateral and monotheistic ideological manipulations. In the words of the protagonists of the twentieth-century *Mythos-Debatte*, mythologies point to an entirely human need, an inalienable experience of man on the path, which is also infinite, of his culture (*Bildung*). This awareness contributes to sanctioning, once and for all, the plurality of perspectives opened up by the mythological discourse, assigning myth a liberating potential (see Segal 2004). The current debate on the concept of the new mythology is closely linked to the sociological controversies, which usually question the social responsibilities of myth, and thus a necessary elaboration of myth itself through modern metaphors or symbolic forms (Weilandt 2009). Myth should therefore be "re-narrated",

to return to the etymological meaning of *mýthos* (from the ancient Greek μῦθος), in order to better adapt to the needs of the digital age (Campbell 2003).

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