

**‘Mythos’ and ‘Logos’ as forms of figurative discourse.  
A critical reading of Claude Calame’s semiotic approach  
‘Mythos’ e ‘Logos’ como formas de discurso figurativo. Uma leitura  
crítica da abordagem semiótica de Claude Calame**

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**Abstract:** In this article, we develop a critical reading of the dissolution of the polarity between myth and logos proposed by the Swiss scholar Claude Calame. Firstly, we examine his general approach addressing two main problems: Are myth and logos opposites? and Is there a progress *from* myth *to* reason? In the second place, we carry out a critical reading of Calame’s proposal by studying Plato’s use of myth. In the main, we contend that Calame’s approach, bound to semiotics and contexts of enunciation, has greatly enhanced our sensibility towards the indigenous uses (and confusions) of these concepts in classical Greece, but that it has also reduced our understanding of the rational categories and the intellectual achievements of the Greeks.

**Keywords:** Reason; myth; dichotomy; dissolution; Calame; Plato.

Whether there is a ‘*Grand Partage*’ between mythical narratives and scientific or theoretical accounts of the world has been a recurrent topic of reflection since antiquity. In fact, most, if not all, scholar texts would respond this enquiry positively referring, for instance, to that famous passage in Plato (*Republic*, 607b) where he alludes to a certain old discrepancy or disagreement (*palaia diaphora*) between poetry and philosophy. However, they normally do so ignoring the fact that Plato himself in certain contexts uses *mythoi* to deploy a line of *argumentation* which *logos* alone could not reach, as when he resorts to scatological myths, or when he, only a little bit further in *Republic* (607c-e), accepts to readmit poetry —that is, given certain provisos— in the ideal state. What are we to say about this? Is there a radical opposition —a dichotomy— between myth (or poetry) and logos? And furthermore, should we understand this opposition as assuming the form of a progression ‘from’ myth ‘to’ reason, ‘from’ the illogical ‘to’ the logical, ‘from’ the unconscious ‘to’ consciousness? As it is well known, such dichotomical approaches to the problem, which were still very active up to the forties in

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the twentieth century<sup>2</sup>, have been gradually dismantled since the sixties arguing that mythical narratives exhibit their own kind of logic – that they possess a form of thought, a mythical thought, as J. P. Vernant *et al.* defends it<sup>3</sup> – that is as rigorous and elaborated as the kind of reasoning rational thought displays. Now, among these, the Swiss scholar, Claude Calame, is undoubtedly one of the leading expositors of what, bringing to a certain culmination, has been referred to by Richard Buxton, as the ‘dissolution of the polarity’ (myth and *logos*). Thus R. Buxton – referring to C. Calame and Geoffrey R. Lloyd – says:

...we might seem to have reached a point where not only does ‘the Greek achievement’ have about it more of the mirage than the miracle, but where we are actually left without a vocabulary for describing the events which were once thought to constitute that achievement<sup>4</sup>.

Now, in our opinion, what distinguishes Calame’s approach seems to be – in analogous fashion to post-modern philosophy – his firm purpose of not giving occasion to any obscure metaphysical or ontological conception of what *myth* or *logos* might be. He rejects, thus, any formulation of myth in terms of ‘forms of thought’, whether we speak of ‘*la mentalité primitive*’ (Lévy-Bruhl<sup>5</sup>) or of ‘modes of thought’ wedded to a ‘logic of the equivocal’ (Vernant) or a ‘mythical conscience of symbolic forms’ (Ernst Cassirer<sup>6</sup>). What matters then is not assuming – as anthropology readily did – that to the narrative

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<sup>2</sup> See, for example, NESTLE (1940) I: “Mythos and Logos – with these terms we denote the two poles between which man’s mental life oscillates. *Mythic imagination* and logical thought are opposites. The former is imagistic and involuntary, and creates and forms on the basis of the unconscious, while the latter is conceptual and intentional, and analyses and synthesizes by means of consciousness.” A more detailed account of the history of myth interpretation can be found in BREMMER (2011), MOST (2001) 32-33, GRAF (1993), especially ch. I, II, VIII, COHEN (1969) 337-53.

<sup>3</sup> Some classical studies that could be consulted along this line of argumentation are the following: VERNANT (1983), VEYNE (1988), LLOYD (1990), LEVIN (2001), BUXTON (ed.) (1999), WOODARD (ed.) (2008), DOWDEN AND LIVINGSTONE (eds.) (2011).

<sup>4</sup> BUXTON (ed.) (1999) 11.

<sup>5</sup> LÉVY-BRUHL (1922).

<sup>6</sup> CASSIRER (1925).

texts we possess, there necessarily corresponds a '*mode de la pensée humaine*'<sup>7</sup>. So, how — according to C. Calame— should we proceed? How can we get over the almost natural tendency that makes of myth (and logos) a *substantive mentality*? Calame resorts here to that relatively new science which so many supporters found in the last century up to today: linguistics. What is needed, we are told, and most of his work has actually developed this approach, is a *semiotic of discourse and enunciation in antiquity*. For if it is true that, at the end of the day, literary texts (plus iconography!<sup>8</sup>) are the best sources we possess for ancient Greece, in that case we should take the way and method we use to interpret such sources very seriously.

Now, in what follows, we would like to present and discuss some of the main ideas developed by the Swiss scholar Claude Calame on this regard. We shall do it in two parts. Firstly, (1) we shall introduce Calame's views on myth and reason as forms of figurative discourse. In order to do so we shall assume two leading questions: a- Are myth and logos opposites? and b- Is there a progress *from myth to reason*?<sup>9</sup> Secondly, we shall try (2) a critical approach to Calame's proposal.

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<sup>7</sup> See CALAME (2001): "Postulating the existence of a pre-logical mentality, and making *that* into a 'primitive' mentality, is an epistemological and historiographical *faux pas*: it is a myth!" or CALAME (2009) 7: "The concept of myth acquired a unity, myth seems to have lost its narrative aspect and come to express one particular mode of human thought: a specific form of reasoning peculiar to primitive cultures".

<sup>8</sup> In his book, CALAME (1986) develops a highly original application of semiotics and narratives to vase paintings. See Ch. 5, 'Vase Paintings: Representation and Enunciation in the Gaze and the Mask'.

<sup>9</sup> It must be admitted, however, that Calame would certainly reject —and not without reason— the terms themselves in which such questions are set. Thus in the first question we use the Greek word 'logos', yet in the second question we render it by 'reason', thus reducing the scope of the indigenous term in a very precise way, which obviously —in the light of Western philosophy— already contains an interpretation and therefore an answer for the question itself. Although we are aware of this 'naivety' (or 'malice') we maintain the terms in order to keep the standard concepts literature uses.

## 1. 'Mythos' and 'Logos' as forms of figurative discourse.

### A. Are *Myth* and *Logos* opposites?

Now before delving any further into our subject, it might be useful to clarify, even if roughly, in what consists Calame's *semiotic of discourse and enunciation*. We should recall, in the first place, how he keeps a reasonable distance from previous forms of semiotics which, having been influenced by social (Marxist) or psychological forms of structuralism, postulate a certain *immanentism* in the production of meaning. There the subject (the 'I') was obliterated in favour of a theory of meaning that disregarded the role of the subject in its inner constitution of sense.

*The construction and articulation of signification, the object of investigation in the field of semiotics, thus became an internal process that takes shape mainly in discourse. Within this tangle of relationships, which are in effect structural, the subject seemed to be no longer the victim of dilution, but of exclusion.*<sup>10</sup>

However, during the 70s —Calame continues— some scholars called our attention to the prime importance which the subject had in the process of the constitution of meaning. Natural language —in contrast to formal language— appeared then to be impregnated by the presence of the 'enunciating subject'. And so, the discourse —and the text itself— turned out to be packed with what was called 'marks of enunciation'<sup>11</sup>, that is, 'traces' of this 'enunciating subject' and of his act of producing speech in the utterance of the enunciation (the speech itself). It was therefore realized that even though the utterance possesses a relative autonomy of its own (not in vain do the classics 'speak' to us still), this does not make the text of the speech something 'structurally closed'. On the contrary, an open semiotic like the one intended by the Swiss classicist results from the fact that the *ego* (both as subject of the

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<sup>10</sup> CALAME (1986) 3.

<sup>11</sup> Calame, following E. Benveniste, divides these traces into three categories: (1) "variation in the verb tenses", (2) "the elements of *deixis* (*there* as opposed to *here*)", and (3) "pronouns created by the opposition between the nonperson represented by the *he/she*, actant/actor of the utterance, and the duo *I/you*, actants/actors of the uttered enunciation". Cf. CALAME (1986) 4 ff.

enunciation and as a narrator<sup>12</sup>) is not a “purely linguistic construct”, for it also possess what Calame calls an “extra-discursive aspect”. The ‘I’, as Calame says, is always “situated and determined in relation to a *you*”, which like the ‘I’ itself, possess a *referent* external to speech. The *ego*, then, in its enunciative level “depends on its psychological reality and on its cultural and social relevance.”<sup>13</sup> The importance of this approach according to Calame should not be underestimated. In fact, Calame’s last publications have increasingly stressed not only the importance of developing a ‘semiotic’ approach to myth, but also a ‘pragmatic’ approach, thus setting these narratives (myths) “between fiction and performance”<sup>14</sup>. This strategy – we are told – allows the interpreter to integrate a wide variety of information (and speculation) based on what is referred to as “ethnographic context”, but it does it bearing in mind that the last source which allows and controls the exploration of the ‘enunciating subject’ (and its ‘external’ world) is always those ‘traces’ or ‘marks’ of the enunciation found *in* the discourse itself. In this way, he appeals – as he put it – to an open, but also “materialist and realist position of semiotics”<sup>15</sup>.

It is therefore from this perspective that our author introduces himself into what he calls a *sémiotique de l'énonciation*, revisiting classical and archaic texts (and some vase paintings as well) in order to disentangle the *structures discursives* of the same. This is not, however, the place to venture any further

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<sup>12</sup> This distinction is a fundamental one. Though the concepts used to refer to this difference may change among different linguists, there is general agreement on the fact that one is the ‘I’ conceived as the *narrator* installed in the discourse itself who addresses a *narratee*. Another one is the ‘I’, or *enunciator* (the bard), who in the ‘real’ communication situation addresses his utterance to an *enunciatee* (the audience). Semiotics, Calame stresses, should study the relationship between these two levels.

<sup>13</sup> CALAME (1986) 8-9.

<sup>14</sup> See CALAME (2011 516): “So, though they are often thought of as narrative fiction, stories that foreground heroes or gods turn out to present a strong pragmatic dimension. And this is by reason of their external reference as well as their circumstances of production and utterance” or “Poetic pragmatics places the internal narrative and semantic coherence of this possible world in relation to the world of *here and now* at its particular historical, cultural, and religious moment” (2011 520).

<sup>15</sup> CALAME (1986) 10.

onto these grounds<sup>16</sup>. What matters now for us is how Calame approaches the problem of *myth* and *logos* within these parameters.

Calame's approach to classical texts is probably one of the most sensible enquiries regarding methodology we have knowledge of<sup>17</sup>. Because of his use of 'semiotics of enunciation', he realized as few scholars have done before an omnipresent risk for any classicist: "the conventional caveat about using ancient terms for modern notions". According to him, when we use the word 'myth' we run a double risk: firstly "giving a historical if not universal value to a recent category" and secondly the risk of "projecting the modern notion backwards on to the *signifié* appropriate to the ancient term"<sup>18</sup>. Unfortunately, as we know very well, these misconceptions have often occurred. Until today, it is likewise common to find many encyclopaedic manuals which refer to 'myth' in terms of 'foundational and sacred narratives that portray supernatural deities and heroes in a transcendent age'. However, Calame argues, an attentive examination of archaic —and even classical— texts reveals a different prospect. What is found in this *archéologie* is that "in spite of its Hellenic name, myth is not an indigenous category" and that alongside *logos* (in the sense of 'logical reason') they are both largely notions of "modern Western anthropological thought"<sup>19</sup>. In other words, myth and *logos*, as we modern readers usually understand them, would be rational and historical constructs which originated a span of centuries after —and not prior— to classical Greece. Now, in a more precise vein, how did a Greek from the archaic and classical period 'hear' these words when spoken, how were these terms enunciated by them? Textual analysis of historiographers, rhetoricians, philosophers and poets from the VI and V century shows —as

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<sup>16</sup> For an extensive application of this theoretical framework to some classical authors see, for example, Calame's contributions on the changes observed in the enunciative subject *I/you* from Homer to Hesiod and Herodotus. Cf., CALAME (1986) ch. 1-3.

<sup>17</sup> In a different line, seeking a comparative perspective between Greece and China, the work of Geoffrey E. R. Lloyd has performed a similar approach. See, for example, LLOYD (1990), (2001), (2004) and (2007).

<sup>18</sup> CALAME (2001) 121.

<sup>19</sup> CALAME (2001) 122, 121.

many scholars now are pointing out<sup>20</sup> — that *mythos* and *logos*, far from the too simplistic formula *plastheis mythos / alethinis logos*, are much more interrelated and mixed up with each other than any enlightened (idealist) philosopher would freely like to acknowledge. The truth is that any attempt to set a strict demarcation between them is bound to fail. Thus, to take an example from an historian, it is at least striking to see that, even if Hecataeus opens his *Genealogies* by mocking the Greeks for their 'many tales (or discourses)' (*logoi polloi*), he describes his own writing (*graphō*) as one that looks after the truth (*dokei alethea einai*), but which does so under the general heading of *mutheitai*<sup>21</sup>. What a nice overlap for us Westerners! And this is far from being a 'hapax', a single case. On the contrary, Calame argues that even philosophy is not free from such considerations<sup>22</sup>, for it is not clear at all that its own use of the term *logos* should be *mainly* understood as 'argued theory' in opposition to 'unargued fables' (to take Jonathan Barnes' terms<sup>23</sup>). Therefore, besides the realm of dialectics, *logos* in Plato is generally associated with 'description' and not with 'argumentation' as it can be observed, for instance, in the *Theaetetus*. There "*logos* is successively likened to discourse appropriate to promulgating opinion, to enumeration of the constituent elements of the object of opinion, and to formulation of its distinctive characteristics."<sup>24</sup> The same point, too, can be observed in Plato's use of myth and *logos* in that celebrated passage of *Protagoras*, where in order to show, *epideixai*, whether virtue can be taught or not, we are given two options: a *logos* linked to 'exposition', *diexeltho*; and a *mythos* that works through 'demonstration', *epideixo*. In the end, however, we are told by Protagoras that

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<sup>20</sup> See, for example, the contributions of MURRAY (2011) and GRIFFITHS (2011).

<sup>21</sup> Nonetheless, we should note that such form of introducing a quotation, as Calame recall us, corresponds to a 'signature' formula. The whole fragment, a very commented one, is worthy to be quoted in full: *Ἐκαταῖος Μιλήσιος ὠδε μυθῆται τάδε γράφω, ὡς μοι δοκεῖ ἀληθέα εἶναι: οἱ γὰρ Ἑλλήνων λόγοι πολλοί τε καὶ γελοῖοι, ὡς ἐμοὶ φαίνονται, εἰσὶν* (Cf. *FgrHist.* 1 F 1)

<sup>22</sup> On the particular relation between philosophy and myth (from the point of view of Plato and Aristotle), the reader can benefit from the contributions of Murray, Rowe and Johansen in BUXTON (2001).

<sup>23</sup> BARNES (1979) 4.

<sup>24</sup> CALAME (2001) 124.

both *mythos* and *logos* have worked together to ‘demonstrate’, *epideixamenos*, that the proposition ‘virtue can be taught’ should be correct. Another bit, also, could be said about the role of myth in dialogues such as *Gorgias* or *Timaeus*, where the distinction between the ‘fiction’ of *mythos* and the ‘truth’ of *logos* finally gives in to the control (*asservi*) of myth:

*But, as in Gorgias or Timaeus, when there is a strong contrast between the fiction of mûthos and the truth of lógos (plastheis mûthos/alêthinòs logos), the choice is for myth. Since the myths of the Underworld or of Atlantis are instruments of philosophical demonstration, mûthos, as a result, becomes lógos*<sup>25</sup>.

Myth, then, for a philosopher such as Plato, is not simply — as Calame *et alii* have tried to prove — an imitative form unworthy of real value, tales to amuse the mob. Myth, as Plato’s own use of it proves, can work altogether with *logos* in order to ‘demonstrate’ philosophical subject matter. For myth, as we read in the *Republic* (377a), also ‘contains some truth’ (*eni de kai alêthē*) and it clearly possesses, as Plato himself acknowledged, a *pedagogic* capacity, which should not be underestimated. What really did matter to Plato, it seems, was *how* these *mythoi* were used, i.e., to which purpose they were put, and not if their contents represented actual (empirical) deeds of the past.

Yet also rhetoric can be brought here to testify what Calame refers to as the indigenous uses of *mythos* and the argumentative function of these ‘myths’ in rhetorical discourses (or *logoi*). His main case has been presented by the uses of *mythoi* in the classical orator Isocrates.

Oratory, as far we can tell, has not changed a great deal in the last twenty-six centuries. Its purpose remains quite the same: to persuade the public. The speaker must prevail over the natural suspicion of the auditor in order to prove that his own (or others) aspirations are sound and legitimate. No doubt a contemporary speaker, a politician, for example, may resort, as they often do, to inflammatory speeches disdaining his opponent’s achievements (or affirming what has been previously done by his colleagues). He also may, in all probability, appeal to his political party — and even personal — history/biography to demonstrate public success and moral consistency; and he would, at the same time, methodologically show his

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<sup>25</sup> CALAME (2003) (orig. 1996) 14.



objectives using figures, statistics and graphics. The purpose, of course, is to persuade the public that 'they can trust him' and, in this way, gain votes. Nevertheless, how did an orator such as Isocrates actually convince his audience that the aspirations of those alluded to in his speeches were legitimate? Calame recalls here the speech composed by Isocrates for the king of Sparta, Archidamus the Younger, who attempted by it to justify their (Spartan) claims over his neighbours of Messene. How does, then, Archidamus re-claim their right over Messene? He does so by appealing to their common history, their *palaion*, or remote past. For in a time even before the arrival of the Dorians, Heracles had divided the Peloponnese into three kingdoms, one for each of his sons, the Heraclidae. However, one of them, Cresphontes, was killed by Messenians and his sons pursued by them. Therefore, the Spartans, whose help was solicited by Cresphontes' sons, took possession of the neighbouring city. However, in so doing — and here is the stress — they were inflicting no violence on the Messenians, they were simply "exacting vengeance on the king's murderers" and so they "re-established Heraclid legitimacy". Calame, then, adds:

*Now for Isocrates this process of working backwards in time has a name: muthologeia; and it has a function: to explain, and thereby to legitimate... As it recounts the ups and downs of the settlement of the Heraclids in the Peloponnese, muthos becomes, in the mouth of a sovereign, a historical and political argument to justify his territorial claims 'logically'.<sup>26</sup>*

So, what we have here is an orator who, in the mouth of the king of Sparta, Archidamus, pleads Sparta's right over Messene before an audience that believes him on the grounds of certain *mythoi* which are in fact nothing less than their own history. They believe and they trust Archidamus, in one word, because they have heard these 'stories' since they were children and they know them by heart: *mythoi* in the middle of *logos* as a means for justifying its own 'logical' discourse. This might seem extraordinary for our predominant scientific view of the world, but it certainly was a normal procedure in the rhetoric of the fifth and even fourth century Greece. Nevertheless — Calame points out — we should be careful not to ascribe *mythos* to a particular category, for "in the work of an orator like Isocrates,

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<sup>26</sup> CALAME (2001) 127.

*muthoi* still do not define a class of narrative with specific content<sup>27</sup>. The indigenous word *mythos* in Isocrates did not designate a particular group of tales with specific attributes that might have defined a particular ‘class’ or ‘genre’ of stories as, let us say, when we recognize and individualize a given text as a ‘poem’ or as a ‘drama’. No. When Isocrates used the word *mythos* he was mainly referring to *palaiā* or *archaiā*. These are the stories of old, which span the age of the gods, the advent of civilization in Athens through the help of Demeter, the reign of Heracles and his sons, the legendary King Minos, the Trojan War, up to the Persian wars and even more recent events (*neōsti gegenēmena*). Therefore, we have the result that the battles of Marathon or Thermopylae (considered by Isocrates as ‘*ta tote gegenēmena*’) constituted a *mythos* just as Demeter’s gifts to Athens did. Though there were (for the Greeks themselves) some stories less reliable than others, in these few cases “doubt attaches less to the truthfulness of the facts reported than to their possible amorality, and above all to the poetic form which they take”<sup>28</sup>.

However, is it then the case, given that *mythos* and *logos* do not constitute recognisable fixed and *apriori* categories<sup>29</sup>, that they were interchangeable during the classical period in Greece? They were obviously not. Calame also sees —the texts are there to consult— that their semantics and enunciative contexts were different. It is thus, for example, that at the end of his speech addressed to Evagoras’s son, Nicocles —king of Salamis— Isocrates distinguishes very clearly between *graphein* (written) or *poiein* (invented) *logoi*, between *suggrammata* (written treatises) and *poiēmata* (poems). Though both forms were in a broad sense conceived as *logoi*, Isocrates differentiates them —in what constituted a rather common observation in classical Greece— according to (a) ‘their target audience’ and (b) their particular aim or ‘effect’. Thus, Calame tells us:

*But, contrary to what one might expect, Isocrates regards this type of seduction [poiēmata] as exemplary. He is just careful to distinguish by their target audience*

<sup>27</sup> CALAME (2001) 138.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. 138.

<sup>29</sup> “Particularly among the linguistic productions, the categorization of myth can only produce an artificial segmentation that is biased, and in the end, arbitrary” Cf. CALAME (2003) 28.

*these seductive genres from the advice given in a paraenesis [exhortation]: whereas Homeric poems and Classical tragedies are addressed to the many, exhortatory speeches are reserved for the man who rules over the many. The former produce their effect through the enjoyment they afford, the latter through the advice they transmit — advice aimed at training not abstract reason, but the capacity for decision (bouleuesthai) and the active reflection (dianoia) required of a king.<sup>30</sup>*

So, in the first place, the audience of *poiēmata* are mostly the common folk, 'the many', who seem to be always prone to enjoyment; while, on the other side, the *suggrammata* are listened to only by a few, by those who rule over the many, and who aim at instruction and learning. Then, secondly, Calame also briefly refers to another two differences between *mythos* and *logos* —though this time some important observations should be made on them. These are that *mythos* is (c) "simply less formal" and (d) "probably biased more in the direction of practice"<sup>31</sup> than theoretical discourse.

Now, what is implied in (c), the lesser formality of myth, is an important feature present in what Calame calls 'natural logic' —in contrast to 'formal logic' —, that is, a type of logic which is characterized by the strong presence of the subject (the speaker) and which can be also described as a "logic of narrative action". This mythical narrative, furthermore, insofar as it is anchored in the enunciative subject, is read (interpreted) by means of an 'open semiotic' in which "each reader and each listener is induced to reinterpret and re-create out of his own natural environment and from his own set of cultural references"<sup>32</sup>. A process, which, at the same time, seems to be greatly indebted to another essential feature of these narratives, namely "its figurative aspect". Therefore, it is important —Calame argues— that we should pay great attention to the *symbolic character* of these mythical narratives, as also to the use of metaphors in them. For it is partly due to these qualities that myth possesses that 'provocative ambiguity' (Buxton (1994) 213) which never ceases baffling the auditor. *Poiēmata*, then, are less formal than other forms of speeches because they possess a natural logic connected to a 'visible' subject that enunciates the story, and because their figurative

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<sup>30</sup> CALAME (2001) 128.

<sup>31</sup> CALAME (2001) 142.

<sup>32</sup> CALAME (2003) 29, referring to CALVINO (1988) 86-94.

(metaphorical) character gives them a certain ambiguity of their own. Nonetheless, two observations should be made regarding these considerations. One is that though Calame speaks of a 'figurative aspect', he is far from affirming any sort of 'figurative or metaphorical form of thought'. On the contrary he is too aware that "these figures are of the order of discourse" only, and therefore should not take any 'substantive' form. Secondly, even if myth is less formal, filled as it is with anthropological and subjective figures of speech, this does not mean that theoretical discourse is lacking in such figures and metaphors. For "scientific discourse does not escape either" from processes which are inherent to any human natural language<sup>33</sup>.

Lastly Calame mentions a fourth distinction (d) which deals with a certain "efficacité pratique" or an effectiveness on the praxis of myth. These narratives, he tells us, possess a certain capacity for transforming history, society and even men:

*Whether it is manifested materially in the form of oral or written narratives, social rituals, or figural or plastic representations, the symbolic process —we shall call it thus henceforth— seems regularly to be aroused by a singular occasion: decisive modification in the history, lifestyle, or ecology of the society in question, which also affects the emotional state of individuals. This modification provokes the need for reflection, operating in contact with both empirical reality and the conceptual and cultural preconceptions and representations inherent in the society concerned to construct a figurative "response"<sup>34</sup>.*

But how, more exactly, is it that *mythoi* —insofar as they are discursive forms— are aimed not only at transmitting knowledge, but also at impinging on reality, bringing a modification to it? The answer to this —in Calame's words— is simple, but nonetheless of enormous consequences:

*But —this is perhaps the way a narrative considered "mythic" distinguishes itself from products of modern literary activity— this fiction, this tool of speculation, is*

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<sup>33</sup> Thus, referring to Aristotle and his use of metaphors, he adds (CALAME (2001) 141 n. 35): "In spite of being very critical of the use of metaphor, notably in the domains of formal logic and theoretical demonstration, Aristotle readily resorts to it in his philosophical discourse; cf. LLOYD (1987), 183-7, and VEGETTI (1994)".

<sup>34</sup> CALAME (2003) 28.

*meant to have a practical effect [une efficacité pratique]. Accordingly, these narratives are in general the object of belief [croire] on the part of their addressees*<sup>35</sup>.

In a word: because they believed in them, because these *mythoi* were the object of a belief (*croire*). The narratives that we call myth, then, corresponded for the Greeks to our own concept of history. And as such they constituted a 'tradition', which was celebrated and remembered as a 'live' tradition, one that thus helped them to make up and preserve their own identity. And so just as the first harvest of the Pilgrim Fathers is remembered in Thanksgiving Day all across the United States, constituting an essential part of their national identity; in a similar vein, too, it may be suggested that Athenians recalled and celebrated Demeter's gift of agriculture, a gift, which, of course, possessed deep-seated connotations for Athenians. Therefore, Calame rightly asserts that these 'stories' were not simple entertainment: those who sang them in fact happened to establish "truth for a specific community of belief"<sup>36</sup>.

But here again we are also told by Calame how Isocrates clearly made out that that *exhortative* kind of *logos* —as it appears in the *suggrammata*— was one which did not aim to train "abstract reason", but instead "the capacity for decision (*bouleuesthai*) and the active reflection (*dianoia*) required of a king". Therefore, it seems, this kind of *logos* did not lack either a practical orientation, though —as told— it seems less biased towards praxis than *mythos*.

Now Calame's semiotic approach to the subject matter of *mythos* and *logos* has yielded some results worthy of consideration. He defends, firstly, an *archéologie* of the indigenous uses of the terms capable of demonstrating that *mythos* and *logos*, during the period of archaic and classical Greece, far from any strict opposition, which in any case should be considered as a result —an invention— of western categories, constituted flexible and rather complementary narrative forms. Thus, these *mythoi*, which were so dear to the

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid. 33.

<sup>36</sup> CALAME (2001) 142. Also P. Veyne and M. Detienne have particularly defended the idea that bards (as also prophets, diviners or kings) might have played a fundamental role in the establishing of truth in ancient (and archaic) Greek society. See VEYNE (1988) and DETIENNE (1996). The status of truth, nonetheless, is quite a relative (cultural) one for these scholars. Thus P. Veyne argues that "truths are already products of the imagination" and that "men do not find truth; they created it, as they create their history". Cf. VEYNE (1988) xii.

Greek mentality, were actually forms of speech labelled under the heading of *logos*, and therefore as such they were considered all the same as ‘discourse’. Their differences, important as they were, though, did not constitute for the Greeks themselves any sort of ‘*Grand Partage*’ or ‘Grand Dichotomy’. Among other reasons because they possessed a ‘common’ objective: “...to protect in memory that which was precisely most memorable”<sup>37</sup>. Greeks, in this way, used these different *logoi*, and often exchanged or combined them —as Isocrates shows— in order to preserve those elements and deeds of their own culture, *les traditions, mnēmai*, that they considered worthy of everlasting memory. And no dichotomy can be observed here.

In this way, yet by a different path, bolder still, Calame has reached the same conclusions J. P. Vernant<sup>38</sup> did:

*Like other forms of discourse, so-called ‘mythical’ narrative is no less logical, no less ‘rational’ than reasoned or theoretical discourse... Far from opposing myth to reason, the theoretical use of fictional narratives about palaia confronts us with the existence of different regimes of intelligibility, or practices of intelligibility*<sup>39</sup>.

### **B. Is there a progress from Myth to Reason?**

To answer this we do not seem to need to go much further. Probably a few hints might help us realize how awkward this idea of ‘progress’ had become to Calame. On the whole, it can be said that the denying of such ‘progress’ primarily results from the general approach pursued by Calame. For once it is realized, within this archaeology of Greek terms, that in archaic and classical Greece there was no class, no category for our modern word ‘myth’, but that what is found instead are these ‘fictional narratives about *palaia*’ constituting a historical *continuity* in time where no sudden break between a transcendent ‘mythical age’ and an immanent ‘secular age’ is detected. Once the former is accepted, and it is realized that myth does not

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<sup>37</sup> CALAME (2003) 34, in reference to poetry and history. Our author also refers, albeit more obscurely, to the use of metaphors as another cause for the impossibility of any ‘*grand partage*’: “These, in particular, are the metaphoric procedures that make fruitless all attempts at a great division [*grand partage*] and strict distinction between logical (or scientific) and symbolic (or savage!) thought”. Cf. *ibid.* 32.

<sup>38</sup> See, for example, VERNANT (1996), ch. IX, ‘The reason of myth’.

<sup>39</sup> CALAME (2001) 142.

even constitute a specific '*forme de rationalité*' (Vernant), for at the end of the day they are no more (and no less) than different forms of discourse, then — we are told — the sole idea of a lineal progress from 'unargued fables' to 'argued theories' fades away as 'our' modern concept of myth does.

Besides, not only is there no strict opposition between these two forms of discourse, but the fact of the matter is, as Isocrates' speeches clearly reveal, that these two terms are furthermore found, in Calame's words, "in close interaction" (2001, 126) with each other. So, as we saw, Plato's use of myth is one which accepts the *pedagogic* value of *mythos*, as also its relevance in the education of every citizen (Cf. *Rep.* 377a-b). But then, again, from these complementary roles it seems hard to understand how the differences observed between these two *regimes or practices of intelligibility* — as Calame calls them — could have given place at the same time in classical Greece to a '*progressif et linéaire*' movement of such an idealist kind. Although such an idealist movement was believed to have taken place in archaic and classical Greece since Hellenistic times, the truth is, Calame thinks, that that came to be the beginning of a long misconception, a deviation from the original and dynamic stance, which perceived *mythos* and *logos* as complementary and correlative, but never in direct opposition nor in lineal progress from one to the other. Therefore, Calame concludes, it seems that we ought to revise our own occidental categories and re-examine critically all the customary concepts that our western heritage has traditionally assigned to these speeches (or perhaps, more simply and radically, eliminate them). We, then, should try a more basic, though equally subtle, exercise: a semiotic of classical discourses and their contexts of enunciation.

To summarize, Calame thinks of *mythoi* as possessing a 'narrative logic' or a 'logic of tale-telling' and so focused on a semiotic approach that searched for 'traces' of the enunciation process as they could primarily be found in the surface of the discourse ("*des structures sémio-narratives de surface*"). To speak of *mythos* in terms of a 'form of thought' would be an unjustifiable way of assigning to it a 'universal reality' — something, by the way, which classical structuralism did — and it would also transform it into a 'genre', thus correspondingly originating a 'science of myth' and even an 'ontology' of

myth. Calame instead preferred to adopt for himself the epistemologically more secure path of narrative analysis.

## 2. A critical approach to Calame's proposal

Calame's contributions to our subject are among the most radical approaches to the understanding of the dichotomy between myth and logos. Richard Buxton has rightly said that "we might seem to have reached a point where not only does 'the Greek achievement' have about it more of the mirage than the miracle, but where we are actually left *without a vocabulary* for describing the events which were once thought to constitute that achievement" (Buxton (2001) 11). It may be so or not, but what matters for us is that the Swiss scholar has brought the direction of these studies, since the second half of the XX century, to a certain relative completeness in the sense that the so-called opposition between myth and *logos* has been at last declared to be simply an invention of occidental philosophy and anthropology —a violent imposition of western categories. Myth and reason do not constitute any *mode de la pensée humaine*, they are not modes of thought (as Vernant called them) which might grasp, each one in his own sphere, some universal truth about the world. In fact, we are told, this new approach has had a liberating effect. Thus, as Pierre Vidal-Naquet has put it: a criticism of the alleged universalism of strict sciences and social sciences is salutary for "we are much more sensitive now to the psychological, social, and even economic conditions in which scientific thought appeared and developed as well as to the infinite diversity of the perspectives proposed by different scholars and sciences"<sup>40</sup>. Calame, indeed, like almost all contemporary scholars, would agree to this. Yet still, if accepting the plurality of views gained by means of such explicit renunciation of stronger (universalist) epistemological positions, is it not possible that, in so doing, we have relapsed into different problems? True, an 'open semiotic' like the one performed by Calame has much to teach us about the actual texts we read, the enunciative context and the circumstances of production in which they were produced, but —we think— it can also reduce dramatically the scope of our understanding of such categories. In what follows we would like to address

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<sup>40</sup> Pierre Vidal-Naquet in the foreword to DETIENNE (1999/1967) 7.



one of Calame's main tenets, which asserts that myth and reason are just western —not Greek— categories.

Now to start one must grant that the rigid classification and opposition established between myth and reason is the result of a development historically brought about by occidental philosophy and social anthropology. The modern concepts of myth and reason *as we know them* are not indigenous categories of archaic and classical Greece. Neither is the idea that they are opposites in a strict sense. Calame's stress on this point is obviously right, but in our opinion he, along with other scholars like Penelope Murray and Christopher Rowe<sup>41</sup>, seems to have led that argument into a point where it is no longer possible to claim any form of superiority of one over the other. Let us quote a passage of Murray's contribution to Bristol myth colloquium, which, in our opinion, also represents Calame's own view on this subject-matter:

*If we look in Plato's work for a consistent distinction between mythos (myth) and logos (reason), let alone a development from one to the other, we look in vain. Even if we were to restrict the meaning of logos to rational argument or dialectic, dialectic is always embedded in dialogue. Though it operates in a different way from myth (whether in the narrower sense of the set-piece narratives like the myth of Er, or in the broader sense of story telling), dialectic is never enough: it supplements rather replaces myth. Dialectic and myth may be viewed as different modes of explanation, but Plato does not present the one as being superior to the other, and neither mode is self-sufficient. Myth is not simply the expression of a primitive form of mentality, it is, in Claude Calame's words, 'a mode of discourse rather than a way of thinking'. Hence mythos and logos exist side by side, and indeed are often indistinguishable, since both are in essence types of discourse<sup>42</sup>*

Now, we shall argue that Calame, along Murray and Rowe, defends a strong form of the argument above presented which sustains that *in the main* myth and logos in Plato (but also in rhetoric and history, as Calame and Rowe have argued) are indistinguishable and constitute epistemological organs equally endowed insofar as neither is superior to the other. We, nonetheless, would like to subscribe to a weak form of the argument which, recognizing the exchangeable nature of the native terms in some contexts and also assuming myth's own epistemological rights in regard to some issues (most

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<sup>41</sup> See their contributions to the Bristol Myth Colloquium in BUXTON (1996).

<sup>42</sup> BUXTON (1996) 261.

notably the afterlife), affirms that Plato's ascensional dialectic towards the supreme *eidē* uses *mythoi* in the main in a instrumentalized form which is directed and controlled, both in content and form, by the *alethēs logos* of the philosopher. We shall, in this way, also sustain, as a corollary of this, that when we moderns understand myth and *logos* as opposites we are not just illegitimately imposing modern categories backwards; we are rather developing further — stretching out — actual distinctions that in some contexts and in view of some formal objects were already there at work in classical times.

As we saw Calame's approach found a great ally in the rhetorical narrative of classical Greece, especially in that of Isocrates. There — according to Calame — *mythoi* or *palaia* were used before the auditor as a mean of legitimation, for — as Calame put it — "*muthos, qua* argument, fits neatly into deductive thinking articulated by *logos!*"<sup>43</sup>. The Swiss scholar, then, argues that far from any opposition or dichotomy what is observed in Isocrates are two types of discourse working as *complements* in one single argument. Furthermore, overall, no prerogatives are found of one over the other. However, we must ask ourselves, is it equally so concerning philosophy? Calame, indeed, — and Murray and Rowe — does seem to believe so, but let us discuss here the case of Plato. Are we to affirm, as Murray tells us, that *mythos* and *logos* co-exist side by side being almost undistinguishable one from the other, and that neither of them can be affirmed to be superior to the other in any respect whatsoever?

Now that *mythos* and *logos* were under certain circumstances exchangeable (as a result of their common semantic fields) and that no ostensible development can be detected in Plato himself from one to the other must be granted, we think, as a matter of fact. Support for this, but also, we must add, for the contrary view, i.e., that they were generally conceived as opposites, can be often found in the dialogues. But, in the first place, how does Plato understand myth?<sup>44</sup> In our opinion when Plato uses the term

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<sup>43</sup> CALAME (2001) 127.

<sup>44</sup> The use of *mythos* in Plato is a very complex issue that requires a much more detailed analysis than the one we can provide here. The understanding of it has varied greatly in the last century. Some classical studies in the field are the following: STEWART (1905), FRUTIGER (1930), EDELSTEIN (1949), ELIAS (1984), SMITH (1986), MURRAY (2011).

*mythos* to designate a traditional story he does it by appealing to three main types of function<sup>45</sup>:

(i) Firstly, myth can be a sort of baton change which somehow prosecutes the search that argumentative philosophy could not reach any further. Let us clarify, nonetheless, by way of digression, that such stories — paradigmatically eschatological myths — do not seek so much to provide us with knowledge (*epistēmē*) of what is beyond any logical proof, for as Socrates tell us in the *Phaedo* (114d) “it would not be fitting for a man of sense (*ou prepei noun echonti andri*) to maintain that all this is just as I have described it”, but rather to give us that sense of moral courage or moral certitude that will allow us to remain confident (*tharreîn*) in the idea that the risk itself involved in such beliefs is in fact worth taking (*kalos gar ho kindunos*). They appeal, in this sense, to faith rather than to knowledge, which is why we must continuously sing such stories as if they were incantations (*epaideîn*) that recall us to the destiny of our souls, rather than to a subject-matter to be known by the faculty of reason. The rationality of myth, in this sense, has to do more with *phronēsis*, i.e., with practical wisdom, than with a theoretical conviction, and this is a fundamental distinction, for it has had deep implications for the history of the dichotomy itself insofar as the notion itself of reason we have inherited from classical philosophers is one deep-rooted in the idea of an apodictic (undubitable) and logical knowledge of the first principles; and not so much in the rationality of praxis which, as it is well known, has run always by a secondary lane —one indeed which classical authors considered a second best in relation to strict '*epistēmē*'<sup>46</sup>.

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<sup>45</sup> This tentative classification does not pretend to be exhaustive. Thus, for a different scheme see the division presented by Janet E Smith in 'Plato's Use of Myth in the Education of Philosophic Man', where she proposes five types of function. Our own view is congruent with that offered by ELIAS (1984). See chapter III, IV, V.

<sup>46</sup> We maintain that this clear distinction which —since classical times— ascribed to myth a form of practical rationality and to science and philosophy a theoretical rationality, has been responsible in the end for subsequent stronger forms of dichotomies between myth and reason insofar as what was understood by rational became gradually subsumed almost exclusively under the idea of a *lógos apophantikós*. As a result of this process the rationality of myth could not cope in the end with the standards of rationality which those very thinkers were helping to set.

(ii) Secondly, *mythoi* in Plato can be brought in in order to show (*epideixai*) or clarify — assuming then a methodological role— some previous assertion or argumentation. Some of the most renowned examples of this form of appealing to myth, can be seen, for instance, in the celebrated passage of the *Protagoras* (320c) where Socrates makes us subjects of a choice — a *mythos* or a *logos*— in order to demonstrate whether virtue is teachable or not, or in that also memorable myth of the chariot allegory in the *Phaedrus*.

(iii) In the third place, Plato also uses the term *mythos* in a political framework to refer, for example, to the tales or fables which are told to the children by their mothers and nurses from earliest infancy. *Mythos*, here, is understood, then, as an early medium, along with music (of which *mythos* would be a part) and gymnastics, for the upbringing — *paideia*— of children. A sort of primary school, we may say. It must be recognized, nonetheless, that this concern with the use of myth in the education of the citizens not only impinges on the education of the unphilosophic man — as one reads in the *Republic*— it also has a say, as some scholars has pointed out<sup>47</sup>, in the education of the philosophic man. Furthermore, it can even be seen — with some provisos, in our view— as collaborating with the dialectical *logos* of the philosophers.

Now in what follows we shall attempt to reflect on the third kind of function of myth we perceive in Plato, for it is there that appear more clearly the problem of *mythos* and its relation to *logos* (here mainly dialectical *logos*). Let us then schematically explore myth's *pedagogic* nature, as we read it in *Republic* II (376e. ff).

Myths form an integral part of the education of all citizens since all, including those who afterwards would be selected by reason of their philosophical abilities to become guardians, would necessarily pass through the same educational program as it is set in 376e, which comprehends, in its initial stage, both gymnastics for the body and music (among which we find *mythos*) for the soul. Plato, then, proceeds to set the distinction between two kinds of narrative (*logoi*), one which is true, and the other, false. Hence fables, we are told, in contrast to the true *logos* (*to men alēthes*) are in general false

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<sup>47</sup> See especially Janet E. SMITH (1986). The references that deal with the philosophical man and myth should be searched in the dialogues (not in the *Republic*).

(*pseudos*), yet —Plato adds— they also contain some truth in them (*eni de kai alēthē*). *Mythos*, therefore, according to this passage is a type of *logos* which possesses a pedagogical role in the upbringing of children and which happens to contain some truth (though we are not told there what truth). Now this fragment has been often quoted as a proof for the urgent need for re-examining the polarities. For, in the first place, *mythos* is addressed as a type of *logos*, and secondly because it contains some intelligible form of truth, which as Plato himself tells us (X, 607c-e), opens the possibility to defend poetry's rights within the ideal state. The ban on the poets, in other words, was never intended to be complete. On the contrary, some of them explicitly contain an instructive value, which, in fact, may well correspond to the kind of myths that Plato himself uses in his dialogues. But then following that argument we are forced to ask ourselves, which myths are to be accepted in the ideal state and why? Plato's answer in this regard is simple: the criterion should be in the main a moral one. There should not be accepted those stories which lie, especially those which lie in an indecorous way (*mē kalōs pseudētai*). Thus, for example, such stories that lie about the real nature of the gods, that is, about their inner goodness and the goodness proper to their actions (379bff) should be definitely banned. Yet given that not all *mythoi* are to be equally accepted in the ideal state, Plato argues (377bff) about the necessity to supervise (*epistatēteon*) those who make myths (*tois muthopoiois*) admitting (*egkriteon*) only those which are sound and well (*kalon*). This should be done, furthermore, by establishing certain *tupoi*, patterns, based on which the poets themselves and their *mythoi* should be censured (*memphesthai*). Yet censured by whom? Plato gives us a straightforward answer in 379a: by the founders of the *polis* (*oikistai*), that is, by the philosophers themselves who are the only ones capable of knowing the universal *tupoi* on which the poets must compose their fables. Now at this point, we think, it becomes more or less clear that *mythos* and *logos* —insofar as its pedagogic/epistemological function is concerned— cannot be conceived just as forms of discourse side by side, as Calame or Murray —among others— have argued. Dialectical *logos*, in our view, has certain prerogatives in relation to the strict knowledge of the forms which fables in Plato do not reach —we shall immediately qualify this claim—, or which, at least, they do not reach in that very same way. But, then, we must admit that the kind of interpretation

we are raising here in respect to the use of myth in Plato might seem an excessively straightforward and simplistic view of the problem. Thus, it could be indeed objected that this apparently ‘weak defense’ of myth — to use Julius A. Elias’ terminology<sup>48</sup> — has been superseded a long time ago by other ‘stronger’ forms of mythical defense. Now, although we do not have enough time here to deal with such an objection as it would deserve, at least a few words must be said on this. In the first place, we think that both forms of defending myth (the weak and the strong) miss the mark and that there is enough room in Plato to attempt some middle course between such positions. Therefore, for one, we disagree with the ‘weak defense’ of myth because it seems to be based on a too unilateral and rigid reading of *Republic X* regarding the status of mimetic arts in Plato and, secondly, because in the light of the rest of the dialogues it becomes clear — as J. E. Smith argues — that Plato also resorts to mythical narratives in order to persuade the philosophic man and, furthermore, that these narratives can also provide us with some form of access into the grounding principles of Plato’s philosophy (namely, the forms, immortality of the soul, etc.). In this sense one could consider for example the allegory of the Sun, the Chariot allegory in *Phaedrus* or eschatological myths, etc. As J. E. Smith has put it, “myth, then, works together with the dialectic”<sup>49</sup>. However, then, on the other hand, we think that the ‘strong defense’ of myth — at least as Elias, but also Calame, Murray, Rowe, *et alii* defend it — is also

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<sup>48</sup> Elias distinguishes in his book *Plato’s Defense of Poetry* a ‘weak defense’ and a ‘strong defense’ of myth. The ‘weak defense’ of myth argues — particularly in the view of *Republic X* and Plato’s conception of mimesis — that poetry, properly purged of immorality, can become the right vehicle to persuade, by means of its emotional appeal, the non-philosophic. The ‘strong defense’ of myth, in its turn, which Elias himself would support, states that the metaphysical project Plato advocates relied ultimately in premises (the theory of forms, the immortality of the soul, freedom of will, etc.) which he knew to be indemonstrable and which were thus ultimately grounded in another *logos* — a *mythos* —, which thus articulated the indemonstrable principles of dialectic. Now in a broad sense we agree with Janet E. Smith when she says that “the ‘strong defense’ seems to be more Elias’s defense of poetry than Plato’s” Cf. Janet E. SMITH’s review of ‘Plato’s Defense of Poetry’ in *The Review of Politics*. 1985. 47:3 473-477. Finally, we should clarify that C. Calame, though he would probably skip on the more metaphysical considerations made by Elias, would obviously feel more comfortable with Elias’ ‘strong defense’ of myth.

<sup>49</sup> SMITH (1986) 31.

wide of the mark, because the fact that *mythos* in Plato might be a necessary complement of dialectical *logos* does not necessary entail the claim, often repeated, that none of them is superior to the other —for instance from the point of view of the knowledge of the forms. Thus, even if such non-superiority perspective might be true regarding the first two types of function of myth (eschatological and methodological), we think that it is certainly not so in regard to the third type (pedagogical). In short, even if we grant that myth can in fact help argumentative and dialectic reason to grasp the first principles (which would by the way be the specific target of Plato's epistemology) it still appears to us that in Plato's philosophy such narratives are always there with a clear purpose, which seems to be, in our opinion, a transverse function of all three types of myths, that is, the necessity to reinforce a previous intellectual conviction which acts —the same in regard to myths told to children or to the philosophic man— as a *typos* that regulates and controls what a *mythos* is for. In a word, mythical narratives in Plato are not the result of a collective oral tradition that comes to us in the form of a collective infusion of wisdom, Plato's myths —even if they normally involve mixing up 'real' (i.e., oral and collective) ancient traditions— are always —we should not forget this— *designed for and with a purpose*. But, we claim, such aim or purpose cannot come from *mythos* itself. It obeys ultimately the whole systematic —yet evolving— understanding of Plato's own philosophy, which is grounded in that radical confidence that states that truth might in the end be rationally reached. True, Plato probably realized that such type of search was encapsulated within irresoluble assumptions (the theory of forms), but he, all in all, never renounced the idea, set before him by Parmenides, that only an *alēthes logos* —i.e., with the subordinate help of myth— could overcome mere opinion towards universal truth<sup>50</sup>.

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<sup>50</sup> It could also be added here that on the light of the Platonic division of the degrees of knowledge and faculties of *Republic VI* (509d6) it seems plausible enough to defend the proposition that *mythoi*, in a strict sense, would be regarded by Plato as elements which pertain to mimetic arts (*hē mimētikē technē*) involving images (*eidōla* or *eikones*) and the capacity of representing through images (*phantasia*). As we are told in the *Sophist* (264b), they would be the result of the conjunction (*summeixis*) of opinion (*doxa*) and sensation (*aisthēsis*). *Mythoi*, in this sense, would be in Plato's philosophy a complex web of *phantasmata*, which incidentally, we may add, seem to replicate the semantic ambiguity already present in the

To summarize: in our opinion the *pseudēs logos* (*mythos*) and the *alēthēs logos* (*logos*) are not equivalent and do not run each side by side, for one (*mythos*) is clearly in subordination to the other (*logos*) — at least insofar as the pedagogic role of myth is concerned. True, this intellectual structure in Plato, as we see it, does not necessarily amount to an opposition, nor does it yet develop in the form of a ‘from...to’, but it seems hard to neglect as Murray, Calame *et. alii* seem to do, that in Plato the argumentative and logical qualities of *mythos* do not stand *in their own right*, they depend — we insist, so far as epistemological consideration of myth is in play — on the legitimation they receive from *logos* and not vice versa (which is, by the way, precisely what is understood by the allegorical interpretation of myth<sup>51</sup>). Besides, as we briefly suggested in regard to the eschatological myths, the kind of prerogative that the dialectical and refutative *logos* of classical philosophy has upon *mythos*, finds — we claim — an analogy in that other classical distinction that takes place within philosophy: that between the pure theoretical-contemplative rationality and the practical-moral rationality. Thus, we think, in the same

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verb ‘*phainesthai*’ according to which it refers both to ‘that which appears’, i.e., what comes to light, as also to ‘an appearance’, i.e., what appears to be so (but probably is not). Now, as we see it, these semantic precisions cannot but make clearer that in the Platonic hierarchy of knowledge or affections of the soul *eikasia* (conjecture or picture-thinking) and *pistis* (belief) occupy the very last position. True, a *muthos* should not to be straightforwardly identified with either of these affections of the soul, but it seems clear that, if we are right in associating such narratives — that is, within Platonic epistemology — with the faculty that presents an object through images or likeness (*phantasia*), then these fables are naturally to be set as a medium or instrument which, if rightly used, may take us to apprehend objects of higher intelligibility, but which in themselves are far still from the intelligibility of discursive reasoning’s objects (*dianoia*) or from any direct intuition (*noēsis*) of pure forms. To object here that eschatological myths are not a dialectical medium to reach a higher form of contemplation, but simply a story that ‘supersedes’ or ‘goes beyond’ the possibilities of rational discourse, does not alter the fact that for Plato, even if they might be the best shot we have at such realities, they are not to be believed *ad litteram*. Instead, we are told, they represent a risk, a venture, a *kíndunos* (cf. *Phaed.*, 114.e.1).

<sup>51</sup> To anyone who might be tempted to object to this that in some occasions it is the Platonic argumentative *logos* which receives legitimation from a *mythos*, we would simply respond by asking: but how is that he knows that? As we see it, he would be forced to resort to some form of logical *tupos* — some more or less clear set of propositions — that would ultimately justify the election and the overall meaning of that narrative.



way in which it can be affirmed that theoretical rationality possessed — at least in Plato and Aristotle — a clear prerogative in relation to the foundation of a strict 'episteme' upon practical rationality, it can be argued that the dialectical and argumentative *logos* of philosophy and science also had — with a view to strict knowledge of the first principles — a prerogative upon the practical sort of wisdom myths exhibit<sup>52</sup>.

Finally, to claim that myth and reason are modern categories which do not find exact equivalent terms in Greece and that the indigenous uses of *mythos* and *logos* in archaic and classical times were highly ambivalent does not by itself bring us to the point of having to abandon an attempt to affirm the *Greek rational, i.e., theoretical achievement* — as a clear departure from mythical narratives —, nor does it confine us to referring to it merely as two forms of discourse. In fact, as we maintained, although myth and *logos* — in the specific way 'we' understand such categories — are not indigenous terms, they are neither an invention of occidental philosophy nor social anthropology. True, the risk of *projecting backwards* our own categories on to antiquity is always something of which we must be careful, but we consider it, at the same time, of great importance to acknowledge that the categories myth and *logos* are largely a result of *having projected forward* what was

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<sup>52</sup> We should recall, in the first place, as we said above, that eschatological myths appeal primarily to belief, not knowledge. Secondly, regarding the practical orientation of other types of myth in Plato let us quote a passage of *Republic X* (607d-e) which pleads for the return of poetry to the ideal state: "Then may she not justly return from this exile after she has pleaded her defence, whether in lyric or other measure? — By all means — And we would allow her advocates who are not poets but lovers of poetry to plead her cause in prose without metre, and show that she is not only delightful but *beneficial [ōphelimē] to orderly government and all the life of man*. And we shall listen benevolently, for it will be clear gain for us if it can be shown that she bestows not only pleasure [*hēdeia*] but benefit [*ōphelimē*]" (italics ours). This passage strongly calls our attention to the fact that the general basis on which Plato accepts a *mythos* here ("beneficial to orderly government and all the life of man") shows a sharp similarity with the type of arguments Aristotle gives in *Met.* XII, 8, 1074b for the acceptance of myth: "Our forefathers in the most remote ages [*tōn archaiōn kai pampalaiōn*] have handed down to their posterity a tradition, in the form of a myth [*en muthou schēmati*], that these bodies are gods, and that the divine encloses the whole of nature. The rest of the tradition has been added later in mythical form [*muthikōs*] with a view to the persuasion of the multitude [*pros tēn peithō tōn pollōn*] and to its legal [*pros tēn eis tous nomous*] and utilitarian expediency [*kai to sumpheron khresin*]."

already there at work in ancient and classical Greece. The recognition of this, we believe, is important because it might help us to understand that the process and development that Greece saw between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries are the result of something else than just modalities of speech. Calame's approach is bound to semiotics and contexts of enunciation, and so he has greatly enhanced our sensibility towards the indigenous uses (and confusions) of these concepts, yet he has also, in our opinion, reduced our scope of inquiry to the mere exercise of language. But the exercise of language, that is, the modes of discourse that we call myth and reason, always refers us — through different paths — towards the original problem of 'that which is', *to on*. Mythical narratives and theoretical speeches are not just a matter of semiotics, for if that were the case science and myth would simply be different ways of talking about things, but in our view, that is only partially so. They are also modes of rationally experiencing things, and as such they provide us with a real access in reality<sup>53</sup>. Greek science — as also modern science does — had a certain irreducible pretension for objective knowledge of the phenomena of the world which, no matter how naïve and short in results might have been, was in itself — as it is today — an intellectual search attempting to reach a fundamental knowledge of what things really are.

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<sup>53</sup> This was not just the case of science and philosophy, but also of myth. The study of myth as a rational (yet not theoretical) view of the world was strongly defended in the last century. See, for example, Ernst CASSIRER in the second volume of his *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* (1925), GADAMER's essay *Mythos und Vernunft* (1954), HÜBNER, (1983) and BLUMENBERG (2010).

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**Resumo:** Neste artigo, apresenta-se uma interpretação crítica da dissolução da polaridade entre mito e *logos*, proposta pelo estudioso suíço Claude Calame. Num primeiro momento, analisa-se a tese geral do autor, abordando duas questões centrais: 1) o mito e o *logos* são opostos? e 2) verifica-se uma progressão *do* mito *à* razão? Num segundo momento, desenvolve-se uma leitura crítica da proposta de Calame, através da análise do uso do mito em Platão. Argumenta-se, genericamente, que a abordagem de Calame, tributária da semiótica e dependente dos contextos de enunciação, ampliou a nossa sensibilidade em relação aos usos locais (e às confusões) destes conceitos na Grécia clássica, sustentando-se, por outro lado, que ela reduziu a nossa compreensão das categorias racionais e das conquistas intelectuais dos gregos.

**Palavras-chave:** razão; mito; dicotomia; dissolução; Calame; Platão.

**Resumen:** En este artículo presentamos una lectura crítica de la disolución de la polaridad entre mito y *logos* propuesta por el estudioso suizo Claude Calame. En primer lugar, examinamos su enfoque general, que aborda dos problemáticas centrales: ¿Son opuestos mito y *logos*? y ¿se produce un avance *del* mito *a la* razón? En segundo lugar, desarrollamos una lectura crítica de la propuesta de Calame a través del análisis del uso del mito en Platón. En términos generales, argumentamos que el enfoque de Calame, basado en la semiótica y en los contextos de enunciación, aumentó nuestra sensibilidad hacia los usos (y confusiones) autóctonos de esos conceptos en la Grecia clásica, pero, al mismo tiempo, redujo nuestra comprensión de las categorías racionales y de las conquistas intelectuales de los griegos.

**Palabras clave:** razón; mito; dicotomía; disolución; Calame; Platón.

**Résumé:** Dans cet article, nous abordons l'interprétation critique de la dissolution de la polarité entre mythe et *logos*, telle qu'elle a été proposée par le chercheur suisse Claude Calame. Dans un premier temps, nous analysons la thèse générale de l'auteur, en abordant deux questions centrales : 1) le mythe et le *logos* sont opposés ? et 2) vérifions-nous une progression *du* mythe *à* la raison ? Dans un deuxième temps, nous développons une lecture critique de la proposition de Calame, par le biais de l'analyse de l'usage du mythe chez Platon. Nous argumentons, génériquement, que l'abordage de Calame, subordonnée à la sémiotique et dépendante des contextes d'énonciation, augmenta notre sensibilité para rapport aux usages locaux (et aux confusions) de ces concepts en Grèce classique, en soutenant, également, qu'elle réduisit notre compréhension des catégories rationnelles et des conquêtes intellectuelles des grecs.

**Mots-clés :** raison ; mythe ; dichotomie ; dissolution ; Calame ; Platon.