

MYTHIC PATTERNS IN "A MEDITAÇÃO SOBRE O TIETÊ"

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In his study *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*, Joseph Campbell outlines the monomyth unit, a pattern followed by every literary hero. (1) Whether the protagonist of a fairy tale or a great epic, each hero pursues three basic steps. In the first stage of separation, the hero ventures forth from the everyday world and enters a supernatural region. After this initial separation from the world, the hero begins the second major phase of initiation, in which he undergoes a series of trials which lead him to an enlightenment. In the final stage of the monomyth unit, the enlightened hero returns to society, hoping to share his knowledge with mankind. Campbell maintains that every hero, oriental, biblical, classical, or otherwise, follows the steps of separation, initiation, and return.

The speaker of Mário de Andrade's poem "A Meditação sobre O Tietê", experiences the monomyth unit. Tracing the speaker's mythic adventure may shed light on a long and, for some, impenetrable poem. These mythic elements also allow for a more universal reading of the poem. The specific Brazilian elements, when applied to the symbolic universals of the monomyth structure, become more interpretable to a larger body of readers. Andrade's use of an epic-narrative structure prepares the reader for a mythological adventure. The speaker of the poem, like Campbell's archetypal hero, follows a quest, gains a victory, and returns to society in order

1) See Campbell's *The Hero With A Thousand Faces* (New York: World Publications, 1949).

to share his victory with mankind. The quest in this poem is internal; the speaker searches for the essence of life and finds it in his poetry. Mário de Andrade has created an epic in which the poet is the hero and poetry is the means by which the hero will try to save humanity. (2) Nevertheless, although the hero of this epic follows the patterns of the monomyth unit and gains enlightenment, the myth itself fails. Andrade's hero never attains the regeneration of his society. Mankind's indifference prevents the fulfillment of the myth.

Stanzas I-IV of "A Meditação sobre O Tietê" mark the first stage of separation of the hero from society. Within this initial stage, other sub-stages delineate in more detail the adventures of the hero. Campbell calls the first sub-stage "The Call to Adventure." This stage is a sign of the hero's vocation

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and takes place in an ambience of unreality, characterized by darkness, dreams, or the unconscious. In "A Meditação sobre O Tietê" the call to adventure occurs at the beginning of the poem. The first lines of the poem, "É noite. E tudo é noite," establish an ambience of darkness filled with gloomy shadows ("soturnas sombras") and nocturnal noises ("... o rio murmura num banzeiro de água pesada e oliosa ..."). (3) The speaker is in an unreal world in which two quotidian realities, the night and the waters of the river, combine to create a new reality. The speaker defines this new reality in terms that display the inseparable nature of the two newly-combined entities: "água noturna, noite líquida." The new ambience is neither exclusively night nor water, but rather "nocturnal water" and "liquid night." This setting prepares the speaker for his adventure into the unknown.

Before he can begin his quest, however, the hero must be aware of the purpose of his voyage. Campbell explains that the hero and his world suffer from a symbolic deficiency.

2) Coelho, Nelly Novaes: In: **Mário de Andrade Para a Jovem Geração**, (São Paulo: Edição Saraiva, 1970), suggests the presence of both the hero and the poet in "A Meditação sobre o Tietê." She claims their presence in the poem represents the union of two facets of Andrade's character: the active hero and the passive poet. (See pages 164-184.)

3) Andrade, Mário. "A Meditação sobre O Tietê", In: **Poesias completas** (São Paulo: Livraria Martins Editora, 1966), pp. 305-315. (All subsequent references to the poem are from this edition.)

With the aid of the light, the speaker becomes aware of his own personal as well as mankind's plight. In a single moment the light illuminates the entire city, and the river reflects the city in its waters. The speaker's initial enthusiasm upon witnessing the scene abates when he realizes that the reflection exhibits an unhealthy civilization. He describes the scene: "E a emaranhada forma / Humana corrupta da vida que muge e se aplaude." These lines describe the collective plight but the speaker suffers his own personal plight. The ambience leaves him uneasy and fills him with apprehension. In this first stanza the speaker twice indicates his personal sickness. He claims: "Soturnas sombras, enchem de noite tão vasta / O peito do rio, ... afogando de apreensões / As altas torres do meu coração exausto." Later he closes the stanza with another reference to his psychic state: "E o meu coração devastado / E um rumor de germes insalubres." Now that the speaker is aware of the necessity of his vocation, he is able to begin his quest and wants to be able to prevent himself, as well as mankind, from taking the ominous path of death ("o caminho da morte").

In the next sub-stage of separation, "Supernatural Aid," the hero receives unsuspected assistance from some force, often a deity, to help him escape from the common world. The personification of the river in this poem serves to aid the speaker with his flight. The animated river possesses supernatural qualities, both positive and negative. Throughout the poem, the speaker periodically describes the force of the river. In the seventh stanza, he refers to the river as a demagogue and compares it to other famous demagogues in history. The river is more forceful than Aristotle's peripatetic philosophies, Socrates' persuasive disciple Alcibiades or Tancredo's crusade victories. Because of its eternal flow the river continues to influence long after these other human demagogues disappear from earth. The speaker later addresses the river as a god, "Meu Deus, meu Rio." Helpless and submissive when faced with such a powerful force, the speaker allows himself to be carried away by the river.

"Crossing the Threshold" initiates the hero's actual departure from the world and entrance into another realm. As Campbell points out, being in this domain often involves physical or emotional violence. The second stanza of Andrade's poem marks the crossing of the threshold: "Meu rio, meu Tietê, onde me levas?... Onde me queres levar?" The spea-

ker assumes intimacy with the river; the use of the possessive pronoun "Meu" and the use of the familiar form "tu" indicate a close bond between the speaker and the river. The speaker also understands the authority of the river. The verbs used by the speaker describe a river that "prohibits" and "impedes" the speaker from refusing his call to adventure. The river "induces" the speaker to follow its backwards flow.

"The Crossing of the Threshold" in this poem is internal. The speaker actually enters himself, his own unconscious realm, where he will find his salvation in poetry. The movement of the river complements this internal movement by the speaker. Rather than leading to the sea or the ocean, the river flows into the land of humans. The speaker recounts: "E te afastas do mar e te adentras na terra dos homens." The verb "adentrar-se" pinpoints the necessity of internalization by the speaker in order for his quest to be successful.

The speaker's loss of contact with individuals and worldly worries indicates that he now aspires a more essential understanding of life: "A me reconciliar com a dor humana pertinz, / E me purificar n barro dos sofrimentos dos homens." His future trials will be a cleansing.

The sub-stage "The Belly of the Whale" immediately precedes the second major stage of initiation. The hero suffers a symbolic death and experiences a phase of nonentity. Darkness still prevails in this ambience. In the third and fourth stanzas of the poem, the speaker acquires a sense of nonentity. He explains, "minhas próprias mãos me traem, / Me desgastaram e me dispersaram por todos os descaminhos." The speaker is no longer one entity. His voyage into the unknown destroyed and scattered his oneness. He comprehends his state of non-existence, but knows that a rebirth will occur if his quest is successful. The speaker uses the verb "reverter" to define his journey to a former state. "Eu me reverto as tuas águas espessas. . . sujado / De infâmias, egoísmos e traições." He has returned to a point that is neither life nor death. Nevertheless, the speaker expresses hope; that from this vile lowliness man will be born again. His own rebirth will provide him with enlightenment.

The first four stanzas of this poem mark the separation of the hero and prepare him for his initiation rites. In these stanzas the speaker remains basically passive. Other forces act upon him and he is the recipient of their actions. His pre-

sent state of nonentity readies him for the initiation which occurs in stanzas V-XI.

The most salient characteristic of the initiation phase of the monomyth unit is the "Road of Trials." The hero experiences trials and tribulations that will eventually strengthen him, endow him with powers to overcome obstacles and show him the way to salvation. The speaker of "A Meditação sobre O Tietê" suffers a series of trials. Each trial immerses the speaker farther into the realization of the horror of human desolation. His basic tribulation is to wallow in this desolation before rising above it.

In the fifth stanza the speaker reaches an even deeper intimacy with the river. He claims, "Me sinto o pai Tietê!" He is in close approximation with the negative effects of the river. The waters, poisonous, stagnant and filled with dead bodies envelop the speaker in the ambience in which he will suffer his trials.

Solitude confronts the speaker in his first trial. Completely separated from familiar surroundings, the speaker expresses fear of being so alone: "Me alarma, me destroça, inerte pore sentir-me / Demagógicamente tão só". The lines close the fifth stanza but the following stanza continues with the same preoccupation. The speaker asks a series of questions, all dealing with his longing for familiar people and places: "Onde estão os amigos... os inimigos... o teu povo... as mulheres... os prados... os museus... os mercados?..." The disappearance of these familiarities leaves the speaker forsaken.

In his next trial, the speaker immerses himself in the marine world, observes the hierarchy established in the deep sea society and compares it to the human world. Both are equally corrupt. In stanza VIII, the speaker introduces the subject by announcing the rotten fish ("os carcomidos peixes"). One fish, "o peixe dourado sonoro," is a president complete with military honors and decoration. Treacherous sharks form a tribunal and guard the president. Eels, whales, catfish and many other types of fish form a part of this hierarchy. Later, when looking at the river, the speaker contemplates yet hierarchy, that of mankind. Both the slave and the multimillionaire share the same fate of being swallowed by the murky waters of the river. Immersed in these underworld corrupt societies, the speaker becomes even more aware of the necessity of his mission.

With the symbolic appearance of the peacock, the speaker faces his third and last trial. The eyes of the peacock's tail represent an ability to see, or rather to be conscious of the enlightenment. But the speaker drags the peacock by its closed tail. He still does not possess the ability to unfold his new knowledge and use it wisely. He can only project into the future and conjecture about what would happen if the peacock revealed its thousand eyes: "... então a cauda se abriria... não seria tão somente o pêso deste meu desconôlo." This trial reminds the speaker of his own disabilities, but also presents the hope of alleviating his solitude and sickness, once victory presents itself.

Victory, the final steps of the initiation rite experienced by Campbell's monomythic hero, is the speaker's attainment of poetry. He talks about this victory in stanza XIII after his return to the everyday world, but the use of the preterite tense indicates that this victory was the culmination of the initiation. Poetry, a boon bestowed upon the speaker, helps him deal with his reintegration into society and his attempts to help his fellow man. The speaker claims: "... na mais impávida glória / Descobridora da minha inconstância e aventura, / Desde me fez poeta e fui trezentos, eu amei / Todos os homens,, odiei a guerra, salvei a paz." The voyage has led to the speaker's discovery of poetry. He is superior to any individual; he has become three hundred. Through poetry the speaker finds love for his fellow man. Poetry also marks the speaker's rebirth. His state of non-existence ceases and he now speaks of his reborn heart, (meu coração renascido"). This rebirth also aides the speaker into action. His former passive state ceases when he begins to make linguistic discoveries, namely the Verb. He declaims "Primeira voz sabida, o Verbo." The speaker is now ready to act. In order to complete his mission he must return to society and share his poetry with mankind as well as with the river. Sharing his poetry with the river is the final sub-state of the initiation rite, entitled "The Great Boon." The hero presents the god(s) with a gift before returning to society. The speaker gives his poetry to the river and describes his verse: "Unido nas espumas da água do meu rio."

Before dealing with the last stage of return, another step needs classification. Campbell describes the sub-step "Meeting with the Goddess." Somewhere along the line of his difficult trials the hero enjoys a momentary bliss. The appearance of

the "Boi Paciência" provides this joy, but, also foreshadows the eventual failure of the myth. In his study *Mário de Andrade: Ramais e caminho*, Telê Porto Ancona Lopez explains the symbol of the ox in Andrade's poetry. "Mário faz da presença do animal (o boi na literatura popular... uma sobrevivência mítica e um valor moral, decorrente de seus aspectos religiosos e econômicos." (4) The author is even more specific when he describes the symbolism of a poem entitled "Boi Paciência." Lopez states, "E o Boi Paciência, unidade nacional e perseverança." (5) The trajectory of the appearances of the ox in this poem delineates the loss of its moral value and mythic survival. The first appearance of the ox occurs in stanza V, when the speaker says, "Nas tuas águas, eu contemplo o Boi Paciência / Se afogando, que o peito das águas tudo sorverteu." The mire of the waters, filled with human corruption, drains the vitality of the ox. Later the speaker describes the stagnant waters and says, "Nem sequer o Boi Paciência / Se muda não." Now the ox is not even mobile. Finally in the last stanza of the poem the speaker states, "O boi morreu." The death of the ox symbolizes the loss of moral values and national unity in the speaker's world. These are the deficiencies that the hero will confront upon his return to society.

Campbell explains that the hero's return may be the most difficult stage of the entire unit. He describes various options for the results of this final stage of the monomyth unit. The most applicable to "A Meditação sobre O Tietê" is that the hero encounters a blank disregard from those whom he has come to save. The return of the speaker occurs in stanzas XII-XIV. The speaker opens the twelfth stanza with a series of questions and exclamations. "Porque os homens não me escutam! Por que os governadores não, me escutam?... os plutocratos os... chefes...?" Manhind's indifference prevents the new poet from sharing his knowledge. He despairs when he discovers that the results of his quest will not be the salvation of mankind: "E hei-de guardar silêncio! / O que eu posso fazer... hei-de guardar silêncio deste amor mais perfeito...?"

In the thirteenth stanza the speaker finds himself on the

4) Lopez, Telê Porto Ancona. *Mário de Andrade: Ramais e caminho* (São Paulo: Livraria Duas Cidades, 1972), 126 p.

5) *Ibid.*, 136 p.

bridge once again. This is the exact location that opened the poem: "Debaixo do arco admirável / Da Ponte das Bandeiras o rio / Murmura..." The mythic cycle is complete, but the myth has failed. For a moment the speaker rejoices about being a man, superior to all other entities, "maior que os vermes e todos os animais / ... que a estrela... que os adjetivos." This exaltation is temporary; the speaker later diminishes his adventure to one tear that drops in the vast waters of the Tietê river. A few moments before he rejoiced about his superiority as a man; now he views his existence as one of the lowest forms of life, algae: "Eu sigo alga escusa nas águas do meu Tietê. The steps of the mythic cycle are complete. The speaker even possesses a possible means for regeneration of his society. Nevertheless, this bereft society, unaware of its spiritual impoverishment and unable to comprehend the salvation offered by the hero, ignores the hero's beneficial enlightenment and reduces his mythic journey to a worthless and meaningless exercise. The hero's adventure does not suffice to save mankind; the purpose of the mythic adventure remains unattained.