

The construction of the indigenous ethos by José de Alencar

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Introduction

José Martiniano de Alencar, writer and politician, was born in Messejana-CE, on May 1, 1829, and died on December 12, 1877, in Rio de Janeiro (MARTINS, 2000). Of all his works, we have chosen to analyze those whose theme is the indigenous because of our general objective: the construction of the indigenous *ethos* by literature, by the media and by indigenous people. The goal of this paper is analyzing the construction of the *ethos* of Brazilian Indians in the works of José de Alencar, more precisely in *Iracema* and *O guarani*. The analysis of the construction of the *ethos* in *Ubirajara*, also by Alencar, will take place at another time. For now, our work will be on the period when the writer sought the construction of nationality.

1 Ethos

The Greek philosopher Aristotle (2015, I. 2, 1355b) presents as the function of Rhetoric “not simply to succeed in persuading, but rather to discover the means of coming as near such success as the circumstances of each particular case allow”, which can be done by analyzing one, two, or all three forms of discourse: speaker (orator), hearers (audience) and persuasive arguments (discourse). The orator, when speaks, builds an image of himself (*ethos*) before its audience; in the same process, he influences emotionally (*pathos*) such an audience. The three

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modes of persuasion of rhetoric is completed by the *logos*, which is José de Alencar's discourse, in this paper. Thus, *pathos* and *Ethos*, via *logos*, are analyzed.

Barthes, in his turn, in "The Old Rhetoric", defines *ethe* (plural of *ethos*) as the attributes of the speaker, which makes it clear that there can be more than one image of the speaker in speeches. By means of the *logos* of the speaker, it is possible to find his *ethos*, the hearers' and others' (these are the three linguistic persons). The author also says that through the *ethos* "are the character traits which the orator must *show* the public (his sincerity is of little account) in order to make a good impression" (BARTHES, 1970, p. 74).

Therefore, the aim of this text is to analyze the image of the Brazilian Indian build by Alencar, and that will take place by analyzing the *logos* of the narrator, of the indigenous people and of the other main characters.

Considering that the sincerity of the speaker is of little account, be him the author, the narrator, characters or the very Indian, we tend to believe the voices that have been presented to us. But believe why? Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1968) claim that, normally, a certain quality is needed to speak and be heard, which will, in some way, against what Aristotle (2015) asserts when he says that the trust must be the result of the speech, and not of a prior opinion of the speaker.

O guarani was only the 3rd novel by Alencar, therefore the author was still little known, but he was graduated in Law, son of a senator and twice president of the province of Ceará, which, in turn, tended to generate credibility in Century XIX in Brazil. *Iracema*, the 6th novel, came after such hits as *O guarani* and *Lucíola*. In any case, we can say that Alencar has some quality to speak and be heard, and this leads us to trust in his speech. In addition to these facts are the historical data: a little of what was education in Portuguese language in Brazil was until the 1960s based on Rhetoric, Poetics, and Grammar. Therefore, postulating that Alencar studied the modes of rhetoric and is ready to convince/persuade his reader is fully allowed.

Thus, we have one of the modes of rhetoric, the study of the *Ethos* to better understand how the national literature builds the image of indigenous people, in order to compare it, further ahead in our study, to the image the very indigenous builds on him/herself.

2 O Guarani

Broca, a scholar in José de Alencar, recalls a criticism that the latter made of Gonçalves de Magalhães and of his epic poem *A confederação dos Tamoios*: "Alencar wrote that, if he wanted to compose a poem of that gender, he would ask God to make him forget his ideas of civilized man" (BROCA, 1981, p. 161, free translation). Having this statement as an example, we showed an idea of how

the *ethos* of indigenous peoples in *O guarani* has been constructed. Now, Alencar says: “Child of Nature, I would step into these thickets, delving me through these woods; I would contemplate the wonders of God; I would see the sun rise in your sea of gold, the moon slide in the blue of the sky” (BROCA, 1981, p. 161). But our author made a trip by the sertão which was enough to revive it then! And perhaps he has revived it, since “he sought to show how they should become the indigenous epic of Brazil into novel” (*O guarani*, published only a year after the criticism), which was said, it seems to us, in continuity to Criticism towards Magalhães. “The prodigious success of the work says about the happy way through which the goal has been achieved” (BROCA, 1981, p. 162).

When issuing a speech, the speaker premeditates to rouse a picture of himself in the audience. The speaker builds an image of the auditorium or on indigenous peoples even through the message extracted from the speech of the characters, for example. Let us see this construction in stretches of *O guarani*.

Alencar begins to build his image – that will make us take it as worthy of faith – in the Prologue: “when you consider what has impressed us deeply, the heart is speaking; [...] the heart is always True, it says only what he felt; and the feeling, whatever it is, has its beauty” (ALENCAR, 1874, p. 6). Demonstrating this character makes his persuasion more efficient (ARISTOTLE, 2015, p. 13).

Carrying forward our *ethical* analysis, let us take the figure of the Indian in the notorious romance of Alencar.

First, it is important to highlight that here we will use only a portion of the novel. We believe that the author of Ceará shows his vision in this part of the book and only resumes it throughout his narrative. Our work will examine the chapter entitled *Hunt*. José de Alencar makes use of a structure that reminds us the one assumed in the epideictic genre. *Mutatis mutandis*, we have a beautiful piece of rhetoric when reading Alencar’s work. This subject – influence of Rhetoric in José de Alencar’s work – deserves an exclusive work, still to be developed.

The chapter *Hunt* leads the use of adjectives to another level. It is necessary to mention their presence in the text because of the high use of such a grammatical class not only in the chapter that will serve as a basis here, but also in the novel as a whole.

The curiosity was present at the meeting between the white one and the indigenous one since the first of their contacts. Only recently the feeling ceased to mark our relationship in a way. However, it is still present. After showing the scenario where the narrative will occur and even providing some secondary characters and deliver clues of some primary ones, Alencar finally deals with the Indian. More precisely, the figure of the Indian Peri, hero of the story.

At the beginning of the chapter we see: “When the cavalcade reached the edge of the clearing, a curious scene happened” (p. 14). Let us have a look at the

use of the adjective. It is important to stress that the Indians and their relations with nature, if they are not anymore objects of strangeness or even aversion, in romance and consequently at the time, still awakened the sense of curiosity. Although the work has been published in 1857, the story takes place in a “feudal society” in Brazil. There is not our particular culture and the values steel, honor, and blood are part of the common imagination of the characters of the narrative. The presence of “curious scene” in the text only shows that, through the European look, and even of the Brazilian who begins to discover his civility, what is about to happen certainly lacks place in a society based on certain values existing in Europe.

Basically, what follows is the presentation and description of a native, Peri, and the report of one of his exploits. In this case, and chapter, the struggle with a jaguar. Beautiful expressions like “Indian in the prime of his life” (p. 14) and “slender and slim shape” (p. 14) are recurrent in this part.

The following is a prelude of what the struggle between the two beings in nature was to be. At a given moment, both are interrupted by an army composed of several characters that have importance for the unfolding of the plot. In an effort to help the indigenous, the army gets ready to go to the rescue of him. According to the novel, we see that “he stretched out his arm and made by hand a gesture of king, king of forests he was, demanding the riders to continue their march” (p. 15). Here the Indian no longer has an *ethos* of strangeness, or curiosity, and assumes the one of recklessness, differing courage of temerity. While the former is the desire to see things soon settled, absence of fear and presence of preparation, the latter forms a pair only differing from each other by a lack of preparation. The Indian was about to throw himself on the challenge without measuring the consequences of what could lie ahead. The Indian, in this passage, has temerity.

He was so aware of his challenge, that at any given time he blusters “it is mine!... mine only” (p. 15). In addition to go against what we postulate about the Indian in relation to his temerity, it is still necessary to emphasize the presence of the reticence in the passage. It delimits clearly not only the dramatic pause, but also produces the impression that the Indian, in the first part, before the reticence, addressed to the whites, then to the jaguar.

Then, the white Europeans – there is more than one nationality in the group – laugh at the situation. The indigenous usurped the right to kill the jaguar on his own. One of the comic reliefs of the novel is quick on the trigger, saying: “Dom Savage”, not reaffirming the nobility postulated by the narrator, but the case ironically.

Then, “In response to this threat [of death before the challenge against the jaguar] the Indian pushed contemptuously, with the tip of the foot, the carbine

that was thrown to the ground, as if to express that if he wished he would have already killed the tiger with a shot” (p. 15).

In his mind, he had a plan. The indigenous, sure of what to do, did not fear to face the challenge. Soon, he leaves the *ethos* of temerity to then enter into one of courage. This may demonstrate that the proof of *ethos* is not sealed. The speaker, in case the narrator, who makes use of it can change, or be forced to change, the *ethos*. This concept is not new; it is already present in classical treatises.

The Indian then waits quietly toward his prey. New information about the indigenous *ethos*. His *ethos* is calm courage. And still later, the narrator establishes that “The Indian smiled when he saw the efforts of the beast to break the ropes”. This shows his tranquility.

Finally, it is postulated that his courage is still loyal. Later the narrator explains the reason of the battle between man and animal. At the request of one of the characters that are to be presented in the novel, the Indian promises that he will bring the skin of a jaguar as a gift. The struggle between the two beings of nature proves the loyalty of indigenous peoples. In a moment of construction of a national identity whose presence of the Indian is a reality, such a fidelity would be an amazing addendum, although it is mostly inspired by European ideals.

3 Iracema

The same way Brito Broca comments on Alencar’s *O guarani*, he also comments on *Iracema*. He recognizes that “the author of *Iracema* was not so instinctive, as many people think. The critical spirit in him awoke early, running side by side with the novelist, and the writer will never cease to criticize and justify their own novels, during all his literary career, both in prefaces and notes in appendices” (BROCA, 1981, p. 162).

In addition to this criticality is the trustworthiness commented, and we have the persuasion in the surface of Alencar’s text, the founder of the romance of national theme. We continue, therefore, in search of marks that should clearly emphasize the composition of the character of the indigenous people (ARISTOTLE, 2015, p. 13).

As well as in *O guarani*, here too we will use only a small portion of the novel. The chapters in *Iracema* lack titles, only numbers, which can represent strophes of a poem; besides the text is not a prose, it has poetry in its form. Here a large number of adjectives and comparisons with the nature is also present. *Iracema* is so described in the first chapter of *flashback*, chapter 2: “honey lips virgin”, “her hair is blacker than the blackbird wing and longer than a palm tree trunk”, “the honeycomb of jati was not as sweet as his smile; nor vanilla exhaled in the woods as his fragrant breath”, she was “faster than the savage emu” (p. 13).

The romantic description gives Iracema a romanticized *ethos* of the wild Indian or of the nature. This vision is given by the eyes of a passionate by this nature, of which Iracema is part or which Iracema represents, at the same time that symbolizes Brazil, America (anagram of Iracema), the new world, the different, the curious. The virginity of the character, repeated endlessly until it becomes a maternity, gives her an *ethos* of purity, chastity, even after the pregnancy, since the Indians considered sexual intercourse the marriage for love. The nature remains in focus, as is the case throughout the novel, and the naturalness of the indigenous girl continues to be described in a bath, in the shadow of the oiticica, during the noonday sun. The narrator was speaking on behalf of the European character who was spying her and who, by a suspect rumor, was discovered, causing the mild *ethos* of the one who lives her daily life to be transformed into a belligerent *ethos*, since one of the hypotheses for that was the possibility for her to be before the enemy or an evil spirit of the forest.

The trice of time between the rumor and the arrow shot in the face of the attacker was enough for an *ethos* observer to appear, this observation is necessary to those who live with the danger; she noted that the spy's features were not characteristic of the native. Beyond the *ethos* of the virgin (perceived only by the attentive and knowledgeable look of Martin, whose meaning is son of a warrior), of what is natural, of what is untouched, the outline of the *ethos* of the warrior was being drawn, the one who knows how to defend herself with the weapons she has.

However, this meeting marked by the blood that a belligerent *ethos* can do arise (and it did) takes just the direction of initial descriptions, returning to the romantic *ethos* of the virgin, built by the Europeanized look, leading her to stop his blood, even because the chivalrous *ethos* of Martin made him smile instead of reacting to that attack; that was how he learned "in the religion of his mother, where the woman is a symbol of tenderness and love" (p. 14).

The narrator, in this moment, says he does not know what feeling Martin put on his eyes and face, but he left implicit that it could be a good feeling, since Iracema stanching the wound quickly and mercifully. This is a motherly, kind, loving, passionate *ethos* (the term *merciful* suggests).

The belligerent *ethos*, passing by the treatment of love, becomes a pacific *ethos*, displayed when Iracema breaks the murderer arrow, stays with the barbed tip and gives the unknown the rod. Until here, the image of the European and indigenous people is being built; both are warriors, both with a belligerent *ethos*, but both also present a loving, tender, merciful *ethos*.

The novel moves towards that direction: towards a love with drastic consequences between two people with the same *ethe*, but formed by each *ethos* with different weight: Iracema's *ethos* is more loving, peaceful, and less belligerent; Martin's is less loving and peaceful, and more aggressive. When the *ethe*

weights balance, the relationship exists; when there is an *ethics* imbalance, then the romance moves toward the tragedy: the death of the one who should possess Iracema, since she kept the secret of the jurema and the mystery of the dream. The fate of Martin was set. However, without even Martin nor Iracema knowing, the shaman Araquém, Iracema's father, made a prophecy foretelling that she would die if she had abandoned her virginity to the white warrior.

A warrior to be brave is expected, and Martin was so in combat situations with other warriors. However, knowing that death was a certainty, and not only a probability as happens in battles, the courageous *ethos* of the warrior ceases to exist in combat situation in relation to the warrior for whom he had affection. Martin did not have the courage to hold Iracema, because death was certain; however, the hallucination caused by the liquor of jurema made the European to call for his beloved, who gave herself to him; Martin made the virgin his wife. Iracema's passional *ethos* took the love she felt to the final consequences: her beloved one would die; she did not know, however, that the prophecy assigned the very indigenous to death.

Martin would not encounter death, not if he thought, intentionally. He needed a hallucinogen to leave his passionate *ethos* imagine a reality during the dream, that is, he would live a truth at the level of dreams, but his plans failed: he just lived his own reality unwanted during his dream, that is, he just lived a lie in the level of reality, because what was supposed to be dream ended up taking the directions of a reality (despite his unconsciousness). Iracema also lived a lie at the level of reality, because, knowing that Martin would have hallucinations, she believed that the intimate union of them was unconscious from the European point of view and it would not happen if he were conscious.

In the case of this novel, we have the passionate and courageous *ethos* of the warrior losing courage before reality, he needed a lie for the images he builds of himself to be worth; the same happens with the shaman's daughter, who made use of the illusion of a reality to live a dream. It is possible to see, then, a coward *ethos* of them both: a warrior who does not want to die for love; and the savage who gives herself for love, believing that her beloved one would die.

Final considerations

The studies of classical rhetoric and the new rhetoric have increased, since the end of the 20th century, in analyzes of the rhetorical components, as well as at the level of the theory of argumentation. The range of themes identified by Brazilian literary works can be seen from the several angles rhetoric provides, one of which is the *ethos* that we use as a tool of analysis in search of the image constructed from someone, based on a given *logos*: *O guarani* and *Iracema* in

this paper. We regard the theme of the Indian with deep affection and we have been working his/her image, built by the European or the Brazilian Europeanized, by means of literary texts, to finally confront this image with the *ethos* built in speeches of their own peoples, that is, their own image build by themselves.

We have noted in these short analyzes that the idea of *ethe*, that is, images constructed, is present both because a character has multiple *ethe* and because the image of the character is built even with contradictory (to be) *ethe*.

The building of the image among the characters tends to make us understand what one wants to arise in the other. In the literature, the construction is made by the author, who needs to incorporate the character for the speech to be as plausible as possible, if the its objective is to search the truth, or alternatively to search the various simile carrying the sense beyond the denotative, making representations that extrapolate reality, bringing the reader abstractions varied and inconsistent.

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