



RUMEAU, Delphine. La Légende des Siècles. Poema épico/Epopéia. In: *Revista Épicas*. Ano 3, Número Especial 2, Set 2019, p. 1-4. ISSN 2527-080X.

LEAVES OF GRASS POEMA ÉPICO/EPOPEIA

Delphine Rumeau¹

1.

A primeira edição de *Leaves of Grass* (em português, *Folhas de relva*), de 1855, continha doze poemas, a última (1891) em torno de quatrocentos. O desenvolvimento do trabalho acompanhou o crescimento do país e a coleção de poemas foi concebida como um texto de fundação para a nova nação. Seu autor, Walt Whitman (1819-1892), se referiu a ele como um “épico da democracia”. Ele mudou profundamente o cânone épico ocidental, e seu apelo para que a musa “migrasse” da Europa para a América (em *Song of the Exposition*) envolvia importantes transformações temáticas e formais. *Leaves of Grass* promove o “eu” como persona representativa (como na abertura do poema-chave *Song of Myself*: “*I celebrate myself and sing myself*” - “Eu celebro e canto a mim mesmo”), substitui a história pela geografia como matéria do texto e o passado pelo futuro como o tempo de referência. No entanto, a Guerra Civil (1861-1865) reintroduziu a história como um componente importante dos poemas (seção *Drum-Taps*), uma visão mais tradicional do heroísmo, incorporada por alguns “grandes homens” (Lincoln), bem como referências mais diretas a

¹ Professora-Doutora da Université de Toulouse Le Mirail, França. Coordenadora do GT 15 – A epopeia norte-americana.

epopeias europeias. Uma característica estilística marcante dos poemas é o uso de enumerações: os catálogos lembram o leitor de Homero, mas carregam um profundo senso de democracia, pois justapõem, tratando como iguais, diversas pessoas e componentes iguais do país.

Texto disponível (todas as edições, em inglês):
<https://whitmanarchive.org/published/LG/>.

(Victor Hugo's (1802-1885) *Legend of the Ages* consists of three parts, published in 1859, 1877 and 1883 respectively. If these have been collected and recast in a single collection, it remains customary to read and study separately each part's internal structure and relation to the others. The first "series" is the most clearly rooted in the epic genre, since it is subtitled "Little Epics". It does not provide a single long poem, but a succession of narrative pieces: the vast temporal span that the work covers, from Genesis to the present time, involves a fragmentation of history. Also, Hugo does not write a national epic, but rather an epic of humanity ("the human epic, harsh, immense – collapsed" says the Preface): the space of the work is therefore wide too, even if it remains centered on Europe (with incursions into Spanish-colonized America). However, fragmentation is compensated by echoes and recurrences and, above all, all episodes are connected by "the thread of Progress". If the work is firmly enmeshed in its time (it is written while Hugo is in exile), it differs from *Les Châtiments* as it situates the current struggles in long time and in a broad purpose. The word "legend" is important, in the title, in the Preface ("history heard from the gates of legend), and in the strong medieval inspiration (with "The Christian Heroic Cycle" and "The Wandering Knights"). The legend however is also that of the more anonymous figures, forgotten by history. In the second series of *The Legend of the Ages*, the poet becomes even more a "witness of his time", while the third series is on the contrary more timeless, more metaphysical. *The Legend of the Ages* has been hailed as the long-awaited successful epic of a country that, according to Voltaire's famous remark, lacks of epic spirit. Baudelaire called the work "the only epic poem that could be created by a man of his time for readers of his time".

(Delphine Rumeau – Université Toulouse-Jean Jaurès/CIMEEP GT 15 - Tradução em português de Christina Ramalho)

2.

La primera edición de *Leaves of Grass* (*Hojas de hierba*, en español), 1855, contenía doce poemas, la última (1891) en torno a cuatrocientos. El desarrollo de la obra acompañó el crecimiento del país y la colección de poemas fue concebida como un texto de fundación para la nueva nación. Su autor, Walt Whitman, se refirió a ella como una “epopeya de la democracia”. Él cambió profundamente el canon épico occidental, y su llamamiento para que la musa “migrarse” de Europa a América (en “*Song of the Exposition*”) implicaba importantes transformaciones temáticas y formales. *Leaves of Grass* promueve el “yo” (cómo en la apertura del poema clave “*Song of Myself*”: “*I celebrate myself and sing myself*” [“Yo celebro y canto a mí mismo”]), sustituye la historia por la geografía como materia del texto y el pasado por el futuro como el tiempo de referencia. Sin embargo, la Guerra Civil (1861-1865) reintrodujo la historia como un componente importante de los poemas (sección “*Drum Taps*”), una visión más tradicional del heroísmo, incorporada por algunos “grandes hombres” (Lincoln), así como referencias más directas a las epopeyas europeas. Una característica estilística marcante de los poemas es el uso de enumeraciones: los catálogos recuerdan al lector de Homero, pero cargan un profundo sentido de democracia, pues yuxtaponen, tratando como iguales, diversas personas y componentes del país.

Texto disponible (todas las ediciones, en inglés):
<https://whitmanarchive.org/published/LG/>.

(Victor Hugo's (1802-1885) *Legend of the Ages* consists of three parts, published in 1859, 1877 and 1883 respectively. If these have been collected and recast in a single collection, it remains customary to read and study separately each part's internal structure and relation to the others. The first “series” is the most clearly rooted in the epic genre, since it is subtitled “Little Epics”. It does not provide a single long poem, but a succession of narrative pieces: the vast temporal span that the work covers, from Genesis to the present time, involves a fragmentation of history. Also, Hugo does not write a national epic, but rather an epic of humanity (“the human epic, harsh, immense – collapsed” says the Preface): the space of the work is therefore wide too, even if it remains centered on Europe (with incursions into Spanish-colonized America). However, fragmentation is compensated by echoes and recurrences and, above all, all episodes are connected by “the thread of Progress”. If the work is firmly enmeshed in its time (it is written while Hugo is in exile), it differs from *Les Châtiments* as it situates the current struggles in long time and in a broad purpose. The word “legend” is

important, in the title, in the Preface ("history heard from the gates of legend), and in the strong medieval inspiration (with "The Christian Heroic Cycle" and "The Wandering Knights"). The legend however is also that of the more anonymous figures, forgotten by history. In the second series of *The Legend of the Ages*, the poet becomes even more a "witness of his time", while the third series is on the contrary more timeless, more metaphysical. *The Legend of the Ages* has been hailed as the long-awaited successful epic of a country that, according to Voltaire's famous remark, lacks of epic spirit. Baudelaire called the work "the only epic poem that could be created by a man of his time for readers of his time".

(Delphine Rumeau – Université Toulouse-Jean Jaurès/CIMEEP GT 15 - Traduction espagnole de Christina Ramalho)

3.

La première édition de *Leaves of Grass* (en français, *Feuilles d'herbe*), 1855, contient douze poèmes, la dernière (1891), près de quatre cents. Le développement de l'œuvre accompagne celui du pays et le recueil se veut texte de fondation pour la nouvelle nation. Son auteur, Walt Whitman (1819-1892), en parle comme d'une « épopée de la Démocratie ». L'œuvre a profondément bouleversé la canon occidental épique : l'invitation faite à la Muse à migrer de l'Europe vers l'Amérique (dans « Chant de l'Exposition ») implique des changements thématiques et formels profonds. Feuilles d'herbe fait du « Je » une instance représentative (comme dans le poème clé « Chant de moi-même » : « Je me célèbre et me chante moi-même »), substitue la géographie à l'histoire comme matériau principal du texte, et le futur au passé comme temps de référence et d'accomplissement des valeurs. La Guerre de Sécession (1861-1865) a toutefois réintroduit l'histoire comme composante importante (section « Roulements de tambour »), une vision plus traditionnelle de l'héroïsme, qui s'incarne dans de grandes figures, comme Lincoln, ainsi que des références plus directes à des épopées européennes. Une caractéristique stylistique frappante des poèmes est le recours massif à l'énumération : les catalogues évoquent Homère, tout en ayant une portée démocratique, puisqu'ils juxtaposent des gens et des éléments variés et pourtant égaux.

Texte disponible (toutes les éditions, en anglais):
<https://whitmanarchive.org/published/LG/>.

(Delphine Rumeau – Université Toulouse-Jean Jaurès/CIMEEP GT 15)

4.

The first edition of *Leaves of Grass* (1855) contained twelve poems, the last one (1891) around four hundred. The development of the work accompanied the growth of the country and the collection of poems was intended as a foundational text for the new nation. Its author, Walt Whitman (1819-1892) referred to it as an “epic of Democracy”. He profoundly changed the Western epic canon, and his call for the Muse to “migrate” from Europe to America (in “Song of the Exposition”) involved important thematic and formal transformations. *Leaves of Grass* promotes the “I” as a representative persona (as in the opening of the key poem “Song of Myself”: “I celebrate myself and sing myself”), substitutes geography to history as the main material of the text and the future to the past as the time of reference. However the Civil War (1861-1865) reintroduced history as an important component of the poems (section “Drum Taps”), a more traditional vision of heroism, embodied by a few “great men” (Lincoln), as well as more direct references to European epics. A striking stylistic characteristic of the poems is the use of enumerations: the catalogues remind the reader of Homer, but they carry a profound sense of Democracy, as they juxtapose diverse but equal people and components of the country.

Text available (all editions): <https://whitmanarchive.org/published/LG/>.

(Delphine Rumeau – Université Toulouse-Jean Jaurès/CIMEEP RG 15)