

THE QUEST STORY AND NIXON'S NOVEMBER 3, 1969 ADDRESS

Hermann G. Stelzner

THE Quest story is a literary genre in which the subjective experiences of life are central. The themes in such stories vary, but the genre is one of the oldest, hardest, and most popular. Perhaps its persistent appeal is due to "its validity as a symbolic description of our subjective personal experience of existence as historical."¹ The Quest story describes a search for "something" the truth or falsity of which is known only upon the conclusion of the search.

Although the themes and the details change, the form or "the fixity" of Quest stories is fairly stable,² one reason why the Quest story is archetypal. When the essential elements of the story interact with the subjective experiences of individuals verbal transactions occur. Occasionally universal human reactions are elicited.

The practical world of political affairs shares many themes with the imaginative world of fiction. When a leader of a body politic and his people seek to resolve a problem, they may be engaged in a Quest. A leader speaks and orders a reality, a form; he offers an *objective* ex-

perience of the social, political, or moral life. However, to become viable it must interact with the *subjective* experiences of his listeners. If a given problem, war and peace, for example, occurs frequently enough, perhaps a close examination of all such speeches might yield an archetypal pattern. Thus far, however, the rhetorical criticism of speeches has not proceeded from this perspective. This exploratory effort centers on a single speech.

When President Richard M. Nixon spoke to the nation on November 3, 1969 about the war in Vietnam he indicated how central it was to him, his Administration, and his people: "I did not wait for my inauguration to begin my quest for peace" (41).³ The connotations of "quest" and Nixon's strong, personal identification with it—"my," not *our* or *the*, convey an orientation and a potential pattern of behavior that suggest that this speech and the archetypal Quest story share similarities.⁴ To place the speech within the genre of the Quest

³ The text for this analysis is found in *Vital Speeches*, XXXVI (November 15, 1969), 66-70. Each paragraph of the text was numbered, 1-125. Thus this statement appears in paragraph 41 of the text.

⁴ This speech is the product of Nixon's mind and hand. He "solicited ideas from his large corps of speechwriters but did not order drafts from them . . . or otherwise use their literary talents." The speech went "through 10 drafts, all written by the President himself." Nixon felt the address "must convey an authentic note of personal involvement. He clearly felt that the speech would not carry such a message if someone else wrote it." These descriptions suggest other dimensions of a "quest." Robert B. Semple, Jr., "Speech Took 10 Drafts, and President Wrote All," *The New York Times*, November 4, 1969, p. 17.

Mr. Stelzner is Associate Professor of Speech at the University of Massachusetts.

¹ W. H. Auden, "The Quest Hero," *Texas Quarterly*, IV (Winter 1961), 82. This analysis borrows much from Auden. The essential elements of the Quest story are Auden's, slightly modified. General accounts of the Quest story and archetypal patterns can be found in numerous works. Maud Bodkin's *Archetypal Patterns in Poetry* (London, 1934) and Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton, 1957) and *Fables of Identity* (New York, 1963) are indispensable to a study of the method.

² Wayne Shumaker, *Literature and the Irrational* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1960), p. 135.

story is merely to classify it. But the essential elements of the Quest story may then provide a way into the speech, and they may yield insights that other critical approaches do not obtain. The critical prism refracts light differently as a function of the way it is turned. The light refracted from this angle may be a different "color" from that obtained from some other facet of the prism.⁵ Finally, the objective political experience of Vietnam structured by President Nixon and the listeners' subjective experiences of life should interact. What in the chosen and arranged language of the speech increases the probability of a verbal transaction? What goes on in the speech?

The five essential elements of a Quest story are stated here and developed below. These elements also function as a rhetorical partition, providing terms for the analysis and forcing the parts of the analysis to comment on one another. The essential elements are (1) a precious Object and/or Person to be found and possessed or married; (2) a long journey to find the Object, because its whereabouts are not originally known to the seekers; (3) a Hero; (4) the Guardians of the Object who must be overcome before it can be won; and (5) the Helpers who with their knowledge and/or magical powers assist the Hero and but for whom he would never succeed.

1. *A precious Object and/or Person to be found and possessed or married.* Because the conflict in Vietnam was central in the political scene Nixon inherited on his inauguration, he sketches its background in swift, broad strokes; it serves as a refresher for listeners and as a point of departure (1-20). He advances five questions that preview the direction his remarks will take: (1) "How and why did America get involved in Vietnam in

the first place?" He terms it the "fundamental issue." (2) "How has this Administration changed the policy of the previous Administration?" Centering on this question allows Nixon to capitalize on the public frustration with the Johnson approach and to avoid any serious consideration of the "fundamental issue." (3) "What has really happened in the negotiations in Paris and the battlefront in Vietnam?" Nixon's reports are scattered throughout the speech. (4) "What choices do we have if we are to end the war?" This is a central question but Nixon examines only two choices. (5) "What are the prospects for peace?"

Nixon does not make the precious Object immediately clear, withholding its precise nature and character. Instead he alludes to the October 15, 1969 Moratorium and comments briskly and adversely on a peace proposal endorsed by its leaders. Intending to unveil a new view, he weakens the old before announcing it, thus avoiding a direct conflict.

Nixon early makes clear that whatever the policy, it will be influenced by the long view of the national and international scene. He refers obliquely to the young, telling the Now and In generation they must yield to his "greater obligation" to think of the "next generation" and of the "future of peace and freedom in America and in the world" (14). The view is global. Nixon's treatment of time and the next generation suggests that stability and settledness will emerge from the as yet undisclosed precious Object.

But Nixon's statements are not altogether consistent. He appears troubled as he searches for a view that will be acceptable to an anxious audience at home and to the international audience as well:⁶ "I had to think of the effect of

⁵ For example, see Robert P. Newman, "Under the Veneer: Nixon's Vietnam Speech of November 3, 1969," *QJS*, LVI (April 1970), 168-178.

⁶ General Ky of South Vietnam is reported to have said before the speech was delivered that

my decision on the next generation, and on the future of peace and freedom in America and in the world" (14). Three sentences later he offers a view that restricts, if it does not altogether compromise, the breadth of his concern: "The great question is: How can we win America's peace?" (15). If this is indeed the *great question*, what has happened to the world? Has there been a shift in perspective? A possible explanation for these contradictory emphases must be hazarded.

The first statement is not only global; it also emphasizes future time. The second statement is restricted and time is not specifically mentioned. Measured against the first statement the second suggests being accomplished in a shorter time. The second statement springs out of Nixon's need to recognize early emotional stresses and divisiveness at home. It suggests that they can be resolved sooner than later. The long war has often been justified as an international obligation. The national patience has worn thin. Nixon offers something to quiet the impatience. He centers on and satisfies self.

The prized Object is finally announced. It is a "just peace" (98), a "just and lasting peace" (123). Nixon makes clear that the peace his opponents seek cannot be prized. Their method of achieving it and the effects of it tarnish the Object. A just peace is more valuable than a pragmatic peace because it lies beyond men and the moment; it transcends both. Here, of course, is the higher peace of an Upper World and such an Object is potentially persuasive when the opponents in South Vietnam, the Communist North Vietnamese supported by Communist China and the

Soviet Union (16), represent the demonic powers of a Lower World.

Further, if America achieves only an immediate peace, which Nixon defines as the "popular and easy course" (11), she will not have set a goal worthy enough to meet the requirements of a "lasting peace" (123), which concerns "many people in all parts of the world" (1). Peace in Vietnam is not enough; peace in Vietnam must serve the "cause of peace . . . in the Pacific and the world" (99). The prized Object has been located and defined.

2. *A long journey to find the Object, because its whereabouts are not originally known to the seekers.* The journey takes place in both time and space. For the United States it began "fifteen years ago" when North Vietnam "launched a campaign to impose a Communist government on South Vietnam" (16). Nixon quickly summarizes the actions taken by Presidents Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson who sent men and materials into the conflict (17-19).

Time is central in Nixon's analysis. It is partially because the war has been "long and bitter" (38) that he rejects the policy of immediate withdrawal. His many references to its proponents are his open acknowledgment of their strength, but he is certain that a lengthy, bitter military and psychological effort cannot simply stop.

The fifteen long years also condition the peace he will accept. His opposition seeks a pragmatic peace. But the time already spent and still to be spent in the search will further dignify the Object. Nixon makes a "just peace" and an "immediate peace" via withdrawal into anti-theoretical images, a timeless value versus a momentary value; the former has weight, the latter is weightless and ephemeral.

The search for a weightless ephemeral Object cannot be rewarding; it is a

it would be addressed to the American audience. See James Reston, "Nixon's Mystifying Clarifications," *The New York Times*, November 5, 1969, p. 46.

journey into Nowhere, a journey "to the end of the night," and the effect would be chaos, Nixon claims. He acknowledges his journey is into a "dangerous" Unknown. But in contrast to the gesture or policy of despair his opponents offer (Nixon resists calling it suicide), his policy has *significant form*. A policy of despair always lacks a reliable and objective narrator. Nixon stresses that the young are idealistic; idealism is antithetical to objectivity and reliability.

However valuable a "just peace" may be, Nixon understands that it must not appear to be beyond reach. Time is both a physical measure and a psychological state, and he senses that to satisfy his listeners he must make the timeless future somehow concrete and reasonably immediate. He announces some of the gains his approach has achieved: "Now we have begun to see the results of this long-overdue change in American policy in Vietnam" (77). The results indicate that both the war and the battle with time can be won.

3. *A Hero*. The precious Object cannot be won by anybody, but only by the one person who possesses the right qualifications of breeding and character. Further, the Quest story presents a Test or a series of Tests by which the unworthy are screened out, and the Hero revealed.

There are two types of Quest Hero. The first has a superior arete manifest to all. No one doubts that he can win the Golden Fleece if anyone can. The second has a concealed arete. He turns out to be the Hero when his manifest betters have failed. His zeal is plodding and pedestrian. He enlists help because unlike his betters he is humble enough to take advice and kind enough to give assistance to people who, like himself, appear to be nobody in particular.

Hero images often appear in public addresses, and they are symbolic. In Nixon's speech both types of Hero appear

and his portrayals of them build support for himself and his policy. The Heroes are structured in polar terms, but because they faced a common problem, Vietnam, the polarities are not in direct moral or ethical conflict. The portrayal is not developed as good-bad, strong-weak, right-wrong, but as practical-impractical, workable-unworkable, or feasible-unfeasible. For example, Nixon acknowledges that "many believe that President Johnson's decision to send American combat forces to South Vietnam was wrong" (19). Nixon supports the decision, but observes: "And many others, I among them, have been strongly critical of the way the war has been conducted" (19). His criticism of Woodrow Wilson also centers on practicality, workability, and feasibility.

Early in the speech Nixon reports on the efforts of Presidents Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson to achieve success in Vietnam (17-19). Immediately following the factual citations, Nixon employs Kennedy for support and refers to him in a special way. About one aspect of American policy, Kennedy spoke, Nixon states, with "characteristic eloquence and clarity" (27), and these are attributes of men of superior arete.

If Kennedy, a Hero of superior arete, appears early in the speech, not until it is almost concluded does Nixon place another figure who is similarly described. Woodrow Wilson, says Nixon, had a "dream for peace." And he "spoke words which caught the imagination of a war-weary world . . . : 'This is the war to end wars'" (121). Heroes of superior arete can express the affairs of state in apocalyptic terms. They have an imaginative conception of the whole of nature.

These two Heroes are much alike in another way. Kennedy died a tragic death while in office. Listeners need not be reminded. Wilson did not die in office, but Nixon says that he "died a broken man," and he stresses that Wilson's "dream"

was "shattered on the hard reality of great power politics" (121). These two examples remind listeners that the leadership offered by visionary Heroes may result in a "tragic fall" if an idealized goal cannot be achieved.

About his policy and himself, Nixon is emphatic; he does not offer a vision beyond his ability to produce: "I do not tell you that the war in Vietnam is the war to end wars" (122). He hopes only to "increase the chance that . . . younger brothers and . . . sons" of the men in Vietnam "will not have to fight in some future Vietnam some place in the world" (111).

Nixon knows that he is not a Kennedy or a Wilson, but he does not disassociate himself completely from them. He reports that he, too, is a statesman, aspiring to the title of peacemaker in the world. How? He tells listeners he speaks from the room, "in this room" where Wilson spoke about the "war to end wars" (121). He tells them about Wilson's desk, "at this very desk" (121) Wilson spoke. The desk is in the room and via television in the presence of listeners. Nixon has kept it and apparently works at it. A moral value is not only expressed; it is also displayed.

Nixon also emphasizes the kind of Hero he is by not taking advantage of a fallen Hero, his predecessor. If he supported immediate withdrawal, it would bring defeat, but he could "blame" it on Johnson and "come out as the peacemaker" (12). To achieve peace at another's expense is a low form of honor. Nixon knows that many citizens mistrust Johnson, whose fall is partially explained in moral terms. More than a few citizens believe Johnson capable of the very action Nixon rejects as unworthy of a man of stature. He puts distance between himself and Johnson.

Nixon also equates many of the dis-senting young people with the first type

of Hero. He delivered this speech two weeks after the first Moratorium (October 15, 1969).⁷ Another demonstration was planned for November. Nixon announced his speech far in advance (on October 13, 1969), strategically placing it between the two convocations. That the Moratorium was an eloquent and dramatic statement-act is a value judgment. That it was largely an expression by the young is fact.

That Nixon equates the young with the first type of Hero is clear from evidence in the address. He states that "some" people urged him to order "the immediate withdrawal of all American forces" (11). In Quest stories Heroes of superior arete often ride straight up the golden path to win the prized Object. Nixon alludes to such activity; immediate withdrawal means "without regard to the effects of that action" (97). Further, to ride straight up the path wins the applause of the multitude; it would have been a "popular . . . course to follow" (11). Nixon acknowledges that the young have "energy and dedication" (112). He also respects their "idealism" (109), a term he specifically reserves for the young.

Nixon and his supporters are the second type of Hero. In 1960 he had jousted with a Hero of the first type, was defeated, and hovered near political death. Patiently and industriously he brought himself back to political health. He and his policy for Vietnam are counterbalances to the first type of Hero. Whatever

⁷ Unnamed associates of Nixon offer a different interpretation for the timing of the speech. They say that the President had decided as early as August 1969 to give the country an accounting of the war and that he wanted to key "such an accounting . . . to the first anniversary of the bombing halt in early November." Further, in "the words of one high source," early announcement was necessary to "give Hanoi fair warning and a chance to turn around in Paris." Robert B. Semple, Jr., "Nixon's Nov. 3 Speech: Why He Took the Gamble Alone," *The New York Times*, January 19, 1970, p. 23.

is done must not risk death—political or any other kind. Withdrawal from Vietnam means “collapse” in all “Southeast Asia” (28). Immediate withdrawal, equated with “defeat,” would result in a “collapse of confidence” in America’s leadership “not only in Asia but throughout the world” (25). Our collapse would “promote recklessness” (30) and “spark violence” (31) which ultimately would “cost more lives” (32)—more death. An idealistic policy, Nixon suggests, might create a Hell on Earth.

It is interesting to compare Nixon’s personal political fortunes with those he has described for the state if the wrong course is chosen. Defeat in 1960 did not mean total collapse for him. Defeat again in California in 1962 did not mean total collapse. Affairs in the world of individual men are reversible. In affairs of state they are not. Or is it that the Hero who has suffered, and understands what to suffer means, wishes to protect his people from the agonies he has personally experienced? He must also know full well that if the nation emerges from Vietnam suffering as he has personally suffered, his place in the history books (the annals of the time) will be dimmed.

Nixon’s policy for Vietnam is disciplined, cautious, and pragmatic. He will not go straight up the path. He has provided for options. Realizing that peace might not be achieved “through negotiation” he had ready “another plan” (60). He will work earnestly; even before his inauguration he began his quest. For Nixon peace is not a vision. It is a “concern” (109) and a “goal” (123). Consistent with the type of Hero he is, he asks to be judged by the cumulative effects of his labors, not by the moral intensity of his strivings.

If Nixon’s policy is disciplined, cautious, and pragmatic, the language that displays it is hard, rigid, and barren. Word choices are both familiar and un-

pretentious. Images are absent; the texture is flat.

Noticeably lacking are Biblical images. Yet the speech is directed largely to a silent majority, the generations nurtured on war and Biblical imagery. However, this is a secular war and God does not explicitly support our policy; nor is He explicitly on our side. Three rhetorical considerations explain the absence of such imagery. First, this speech is not so much a war message as it is a message about a war. Second, Vietnam is a small war that Presidents Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson sought to localize and restrain. Nixon, too, aims to deflate it. Biblical images have magnitude, scope, and thrust. Thus, on both logical and aesthetic grounds they are simply “too large” for the problem. Third, Biblical images connote ethical and moral values. Keeping the war secular, and justifying it with political, military, and economic values, deprives the opposition of a potential issue. Further, Nixon does not give the silent majority an opportunity to consciously consider if the Biblical imagery and the Vietnam war are consistent. He avoids constructing for them a potentially disturbing dilemma.

Either type of Hero-president can use the power of the Office to further policies. Nixon reports on many of his efforts. He sent emissaries across the water (another part of the long journey) to the symbolic capital of the civilized—and thus safe—world, Paris, to meet with the North Vietnamese (37). He himself crossed the water to inspect the unsafe world and to receive firsthand reports about our efforts to stabilize it, a dimension of civilization. Then from Guam, that piece of secure United States territory nearest the conflict, he intoned from afar a shift in foreign policy (61). The policy is given a potentially potent name, Vietnamization (72 and 74). The phonetic similarities between Vietnamization

and Americanization suggest our continued influence and concern. He also announces that other "significant initiatives which must remain secret to keep open some channels of communications" (54) are in progress. Further, he sends a letter to Ho Chi Minh through an unnamed representative who had known Minh personally for 25 years; a dimension of intrigue is added to the effort. In some reports there are signs of hope. Nixon refers to the "deadlock" (44) in negotiations, but perhaps new energies will come from this tired metaphor. He refers to the letter he received from Ho Chi Minh, "three days before his death" (52). The letter says nothing new, but may not its writer's death be read as a hopeful harbinger of some new movement? Of what significance is the report of Minh's death, if not that? In deadlock and in death itself is the potential for rebirth.

Nixon's policy, language, and behavior reveal him as a Hero whose omnipotence and omniscience are limited.

4. *The Guardians of the Object who must be overcome before it can be won.* They may simply be a further test of the Hero's arete, or they may be malignant in themselves.

That the government of North Vietnam is both different from and in opposition to the United States is understood. In the popular mind, North Vietnam is malignant simply because it is communist; external motives are neither necessary to its behavior nor can they ever fully explain its behavior. Nixon does nothing to soften that view. Rather he emphasizes and develops it. An evil government will instigate and support revolutions: in the time past, in the present time, and in the future (22-24). Nixon's language is extremely severe: "murdered," "thousands . . . died in slave labor camps," "civilians were clubbed, shot, . . . and buried in mass graves," "a

bloody reign of terror," and a "nightmare" in South Vietnam describe the North Vietnamese activities; the government is presented as being much worse than an undeveloped version of ourselves. Surely in an address about a war the image of the dual experience, a contest between two sides, friends and enemies, is expected. Nixon emphasizes animality and bestiality.

But the North Vietnamese also present further tests to the Hero and the American people. Nixon details the proposals the United States has advanced. We will work in common and will be open-minded (50). Except for the right of the people of South Vietnam to determine their own future "anything is negotiable" (36). Again and again Nixon remarks on the responses to such proposals. Hanoi has "refused even to discuss our proposals" (37). In Paris a "deadlock" (44) developed. Further negotiation "depends only on Hanoi's deciding to negotiate" (58). The silent, uninvolved, non-participating North Vietnamese made success difficult. Nixon's tone is objective. But to stress his personal exasperation, he concludes with a folksy idiom consistent with his common-sense observation: "Well, now, who's at fault?" (56).

A war message and the Quest story share the presupposition that one side is good, the other bad. But our *objective experience* of social and political life informs us otherwise. The moral ambiguities of political conflicts do not adhere to the proposition. But in war, men stereotype, reserving the good for their side and the bad for their opponents. And any virtues an enemy may possess are ignored.⁸

⁸ Nixon's descriptions of the North Vietnamese are consistent with this observation. He does express emotion apart from intellect and there is a certain automatism in the analysis. However, it is inaccurate to use the metaphor of intoxication, which often designates the complete breakdown of rhetorical control. There is little doubt that what listeners are asked to

5. *The Helpers who with their knowledge and/or magical powers assist the Hero and but for whom he would never succeed.* Ideally, all citizens in a democracy will be Helpers, but in a "free society" (104) dissent is recognized and tolerated. However, if dissenters take to the streets they might bind a president and circumscribe his options. In such a situation, what may be of greater danger than a dissenting Chorus is a confused, perplexed, and silent Chorus. To a Hero in need of support a formless and mute Chorus presents problems. How does a Hero-president "divine" what a silent majority will hear? Although Nixon can neither see it nor hear it, he has personal resources. His private vision furnishes him direction.

The rhetorical strategy emerges slowly and develops late. The approach to silent America is through young America, or for purposes of a rhetorical antithesis "shrill America." The young have been described. They are fervent, vocal, idealistic, energetic, and dedicated (107-112). These are positive virtues. Nixon counters them with a single negative particular that explains how the young have gone wrong. The positive virtues have been turned "into bitter hatred" (112). Bitter hatred is irrational. It is, Nixon suggests, the tragic flaw in the character of the young.

If a democracy tolerates dissent and if men of station and experience have something to say to those (the young) who have achieved less, it is reasonable to assume that the young will attend to the President. It is also reasonable to assume that the President may speak directly to any audience. Yet when Nixon addresses the young, he casts doubt on

these assumptions. He asks permission: "I would like to address a word, if I may, to the young people of this nation" (108). The deliberately artificial idiom creates a cool and distant relationship. A superior depicts himself begging favors of an inferior and in the inversion Nixon discards the rhetorical mask of sociability. He comes close to portraying himself as a "silent American" or still better for his purposes a "silenced American." If the President approaches the young in this fashion, he suggests to others that the young people are a serious problem.

Nixon, however, had stated a policy. He had forcefully declared that he would not be "dictated" to "by the minority" (105). Should other adults adopt his stance? If the connotations of the word "dictate" central to our involvement in Vietnam are extended, the answer is positive. If we are helping South Vietnam to avoid being dictated to by a belligerent minority, surely the people at home can also resist being dictated to.

The stance provides Nixon with an opportunity to give added force to nostalgic values: "I know it may not be fashionable to speak of patriotism or national destiny these days" (114). The negative emphasizes the positive. These values are the beacon lights that confirm the reality of democratic form. They indicate that democracy is not yet, at least, invisible and unrecognizable. A citizenry and a nation unaware of their form live a death.

Together the discussion of the young and of values prepares that audience Nixon has yet to address directly: "So tonight, to you, the great silent majority of my fellow Americans, I ask for your support" (118).⁹ Silent America has been

embrace is in part a projection from Nixon's own emotional life. Insofar as the public scene is concerned, an obsessive repetition of verbal formulas may not stand up in objective discussions of public policy, and the audience may not become as cohesive as the speaker may like.

⁹ Associates report that Nixon had difficulty developing a satisfactory conclusion for the speech. He had jotted down numerous phrases he wanted to use but could not find room for. One read: "I don't want demonstrations, I want your quiet support." The line in the text seems

invited to speak; it need not ask permission. A formal fashion is preserved. Further, Nixon's private vision rhetorically developed before a public, creates a new form or audience, the "silent majority." The Helpers in the citizen Chorus who were confused and perplexed are made cohesive and real. They are no longer invisible and unrecognizable to themselves. They are also made visible and recognizable to others.

Nixon gives added meaning to patriotism and destiny by commenting on their history and heritage. "Two hundred years ago" America "was the hope of millions" (115) and the "wheel of destiny" has now placed "any hope the world has for the survival of peace and freedom" (116) squarely upon her. Survival suggests life; its absence, death. To his silent majority Nixon says: He who rejects his heritage rejects humanity, and thus himself. Rejection of self is a form of suicide that affects others. A conscious rejection of heritage, humanity, and self by Americans will cause the hopes of others (Vietnamese primarily, but other millions as well) "to be suffocated" (117), still another form of death, perhaps even murder in the first degree.

If history and heritage are rejected, then further tragedy may be expected. Sooner or later we would have "more wars," which "would cost more lives" (32). But Nixon carefully avoids an ultimate conclusion. He does not say that the United States would be overcome. If we desert Asia, we would "lose confidence in ourselves." As we "saw the consequences . . . inevitable remorse and divisive recrimination would scar our spirit as a people" (100). Here, too, he avoids a final conclusion, but he describes a country peopled by "nameless strangers." The conclusions drawn from Nixon's ob-

jective statements are easily cast into images of self-extinction.

When the silent majority speaks, it participates. Constructive action may then occur at home and abroad (119). But the silent majority speaks not only because it has been asked to. Unless it speaks and participates, it will act much like the North Vietnamese who earlier had been portrayed as nonspeakers and uninvolved participants. The silent majority cannot or will not speak and act like the young; yet neither can it not speak and not act as the North Vietnamese have done. Where then should it place itself? The silent majority will take a middle position, out of choice perhaps, but not until choice has been suggested by the polarities of Nixon's rhetorical structure. For his policy Nixon has a public. He has Helpers.

The resolution of the Vietnam war Nixon terms a quest, a "big" word suggesting magnitude, great risks, and tremendous moments. A true quest has moments so large that they lack definite boundaries and risks of such magnitude that they cannot easily be faced or exactly described by those who must endure them. To look for a paper clip is not a true quest.

Nixon positions the word in the right place—early in the speech. But the word itself is wrong. His policy does differ from those of his predecessors. But it remains one of cautious, subtle modifications. He offers no new imaginative whole; indeed he blunts such considerations. Immediate withdrawal has magnitude, and potentially great risks and moments. Nixon rejects it. Those who call for a serious discussion of war as an important instrument of foreign policy ask fundamental questions of value. They are nearer to Wilson than to Nixon. To the call, Nixon is silent.

Nixon's political narrative also fails as a quest because he does not structure

to have emerged from such jottings. Semple, "Nixon's Nov. 3 Speech . . .," p. 23.

a direct confrontation between himself and the leader of the Guardians of the Object. It is Nixon who prophesies that immediate withdrawal means the loss of Asia and the loss of respect throughout the world. But has Ho Chi Minh or his successor claimed that great a victory growing out of the war? If yes, why doesn't Nixon confront them or him? Let him meet and overthrow the claims of his opponents and show that they are braggadocios. Nixon's prophecy may be correct. But he may also claim more for the Guardians than they claim for themselves. To that extent his political analysis is braggadocian.

Nixon's confrontation with the young is direct. And his listeners have both seen and heard the young. Many believe social unrest at home is an urgent matter. They have again been asked to be patient about Vietnam. Many seem willing, but their frustrations remain intense. Nixon directs them to satisfy them by meeting, testing, and overthrowing the claims of young, loud, windy, braggadocios. The strategy adds little nobility or grandeur to his Quest.

Within the development of his Quest, Nixon illustrates how a Hero as one historical personage may move to larger Heroic groups.¹⁰ There was the Great but Woolly Woodrow, Paternal Ike, Dashing John, and finally Black Lyndon. All had opportunities and moments. Now Somber Richard, a different Hero,

¹⁰ I am indebted to Professor Ernest Bormann, University of Minnesota, who read a draft of this essay and suggested this insightful interpretation.

appears to establish a new Heroic group, the silent majority.

The relationship between Nixon and the silent majority parallels in general outline a standard myth pattern. Nixon fought political battles, lost, and disappeared. He had fallen, becoming a part of the silent minority. During his absence various events caused his followers and others to wonder whether they and their world had fallen. Nixon's risen political body now speaks with a strong voice, uniting and reuniting others with him.

Listeners who sensed the Devil in all around them were assured, if not exhilarated. Traditional values such as the confident love of country, of personal and public honor, of pride in soldiership and citizenship were affirmed. This Hero does not believe that these values are sins. He will confront those who do.

Evaluated in literary terms Nixon's political narrative is obviously not a good Quest story. It is not altogether convincing. There are too many loose ends and too many unanswered questions. It is peopled by flat characters and its language is dull and unimaginative.

This speech was not offered to the public as a literary work. It deals with practical political problems and if evaluated accordingly it accomplishes some objectives. Although divisiveness in the political community remains, Nixon gains an audience and time. He finds listeners who will respond to his words and images. He gains a firmer possession of the policy he lays out before them and makes himself ready for the next series of events he must deal with in Vietnam.

