

HELDER MALTA MACEDO, B.A., Ph.D.

THE PURPOSE OF PRAISE:
PAST AND FUTURE IN *THE LUSIADS*
OF LUÍS DE CAMÕES



AN INAUGURAL LECTURE
IN THE CAMOENS CHAIR OF PORTUGUESE

given on
November 15, 1983

KING'S COLLEGE LONDON

INTRODUCTION

The Camoens Chair was established in 1919 and the Department of Portuguese and Brazilian Studies at King's College remains the only one of its kind in the United Kingdom. This is in many ways a pity, considering not only the wealth of Portuguese scholarship that exists at other British universities but also the value of the subject for other disciplines: the study of European civilization requires an understanding of the Portuguese culture at the heart of the movement of expansion which shaped the identity of the modern world; the study of Latin America without its Brazilian dimension is inevitably limited; Portuguese historiography provides basic sources for the study of Asian history; and five newly independent Portuguese-speaking nations in Africa must be taken into account by anyone trying to understand the history and culture of that continent.

The wide-ranging scope of the subject is reflected in the academic interests of my predecessors. Indeed, one of them contributed to knowledge in all the areas I have mentioned. I mean, of course, the historian – and Camoens Professor Emeritus – Charles Boxer or, as he was at the time of his appointment to the Chair in 1947, Major C. R. Boxer. It shows a distinct lack of military discipline on my part that I should break the ranks of precedence and mention his name first. But not a lack of historical perspective.

Professor Boxer's predecessors were Sir George Young, from 1919 to 1923, whose special interest in the Ottoman Empire is not without irony considering that Camões served as a soldier on the other side; and Edgar Prestage, from 1923 to 1936, whose solid scholarship established the department's worldwide academic reputation. On his retirement, Edgar Prestage gave the bulk of his remarkable Portuguese library to the College, a gift for which generations of students have cause to be grateful.

S. George West was interim head of the department before leaving this country to set up the British Institute in Lisbon, and the Chair remained vacant from the beginning of the war until 1947.

Stephen Reckert succeeded Professor Boxer in 1967 and, to the regret of his students and colleagues, decided to take early retirement in 1982 to concentrate on research and writing. Like Professor Boxer, he is now Camoens Professor Emeritus.

Professor Reckert reinforced the literary component of the courses offered by the department, which he renamed in order to indicate that a greater emphasis was to be placed on Brazilian studies. His published works have contributed in no small measure to the critical appreciation of both literatures, while his remarkable knowledge of other languages and literatures always enabled him to make illuminating comparativist connections, as is well illustrated in his own inaugural lecture on "Lyra Minima", or miniature traditional poetry, for which he drew on analogies not only in non-Iberian but also in non-European Languages. To gauge the academic success of the department during the fourteen years of his tenure, I think it is enough to mention that eight former students have become university lecturers or professors: four in the United Kingdom, two in Brazil, one in Portugal and one in Zimbabwe.

I am one of them. When I came to King's as a mature student, I was a poet who set a greater value on creativity than on scholarship. If I have learned the creative value of scholarship it is thanks to my teachers at this College, both in the Department of Portuguese and in the Department of History.

As Camoens Professor, any contribution which I may make to Portuguese studies at King's will have been greatly facilitated by the strength of the tradition I have inherited and which I hope to continue.

THE PURPOSE OF PRAISE: PAST AND FUTURE IN *THE LUSIADS* OF LUÍS DE CAMÕES

Epic poetry, even when it concerns real historical persons or events, always represents a metaphorical vision of history. It embodies the poet's conception of what that history means to his own age so that the past being celebrated in the poem becomes exemplary. The notion of celebration is, in fact, intrinsic to epic, being perhaps the only characteristic common to a form so diverse that it can include primitive saga and the experimental modern novel, with themes ranging from the mysteries of religion and the achievements of a hero to the significance of a nation's history. Indeed, celebration is to epic what regret for the golden age, or for a comparatively better age, is to pastoral, which tends to criticize the very deeds which the epic praises.

The Lusíads celebrates Portugal or, more specifically, what Camões calls "o peito ilustre lusitano" – "the illustrious Portuguese soul" (I.3). In the opening stanzas, Camões emphasizes the crucial difference between myth and history, between individual achievement and collective endeavour. Claiming that the real historical achievements which his poem praises are greater than all the fabled deeds of the heroes of romance, he boldly asserts that the epic history of Portugal, being true, will surpass the epics of antiquity and that Vasco da Gama will rob Aeneas of his fame (I.12).

The comparison between Gama and Aeneas is central to the conception of history which Camões embodies in his poem. For if the mythical voyage of Aeneas led to the foundation of Rome, the historical voyage of Gama in 1498 marked the beginnings of the Portuguese empire in the East. Gama's voyage provides Camões with the main narrative axis for his poem: around it he weaves an account of his country's history from its beginnings as a nation to his own day. And just as Virgil sees in the mythical foundation of Rome by Aeneas a symbolically unbroken connection with the imperial Rome of his own day, so Camões sees in Gama's voyage the culminating moment in Portugal's history when, like Rome, it achieved a universal destiny.

But there is an essential difference in the way the two poets see the nature of the connection between past and present. In the *Aeneid*, Virgil celebrates the past in order to praise the present: by linking his mythical hero, Aeneas, to his living patron, Augustus Caesar, he identifies the ideals of the Augustan age with the heroic virtues that made Rome. In *The Lusíads* Camões does the very opposite: he praises the past in order to criticize the present. Through the series of first-person comments and reflections which he interposes into the epic discourse, he contrasts the injustice and corruption of his own age with the virtues that had made Portugal great, and calls for new efforts and new sacrifices to restore the spirit of the past.

By using the first person to make critical and moralistic comments on current issues, Camões was departing from the conventions of the classical epic, in which the poet's own views are given implicitly, never – or only seldom – explicitly or directly.¹ But this device, which he adapted from the poets of chivalrous epic, Boiardo and Ariosto, enabled him to incorporate into his poem a contemporary perspective. And seen from the perspective of the unheroic times in which the poem is being written, the claim that the achievements it praises are historically true emphasizes the contrast between the present and the past, providing an insidiously ambiguous counterpoint to the language of epic praise.

C. M. Bowra has said that “literary epic . . . flourishes not in the heyday of a nation or of a cause but in its last days or in its aftermath. At such time a man surveys the recent past with its record of dazzling successes and asks if they can last; he analyses its strength, announces its importance, urges its continuance”.² In the case of Virgil, continuance seemed assured: he wrote the *Aeneid* during the “golden” reign of Augustus, a time of political and moral revival. When Camões published *The Lusiads* in 1572, Portugal's imperial expansion had drained the kingdom of men and money: the countryside was depopulated, impoverished and inert.³ The king of Portugal – the prospective patron to whom Camões addresses his poem – was the eighteen-year old Dom Sebastião, a sickly and unstable adolescent whose physical condition and irresponsible behaviour aroused the increasing disquiet of his subjects.

The extraordinary importance which the unfortunate Sebastian had for Portugal owes as much to legend as to history. Even before his birth in 1554 he had been the focus of national anxiety and millenarian expectations. Fears that the Portuguese crown would pass to a foreigner had been fanned by the successive deaths of seven of the nine children of King John III. As his last surviving daughter was married to Philip II of Spain and the health of the surviving male heir, Prince John, was precarious, the House of Aviz was, in fact, threatened with extinction. But a fortnight after Prince John died at the age of seventeen, his young widow gave birth to a son, Sebastian. Hailed as “O Desejado” or “The Desired One” by a nation which saw in him the embodiment of its hopes for survival as an independent kingdom, Dom Sebastião succeeded his grandfather at the age of three and, as “O Rei Menino” (“The Boy King”) he was readily associated with a current of messianic yearning, which had been swelling in response to the critical state of the kingdom's fortunes.

From what we know of Sebastian, however, the “Desired One” of history and legend was hardly of a mould to fulfil such expectations. Abandoned by his mother at birth, he was brought up in an atmosphere of hysterical religious fervour accompanied by an anachronistic revival of chivalrous ideals. Militantly celibate and probably impotent (a condition whose clinical details were repeatedly commented upon in the diplomatic

correspondence of the Spanish ambassadors to Lisbon) he was physically deformed, the right side of his body being far longer than the left. In spite of this handicap, he was obsessed with physical prowess and addicted to violent exercises, especially hunting, an activity for which he neglected his royal duties. Worse still, he was surrounded by religious counsellors who encouraged his fanatical belief that he had been called upon to act as Christ's captain, conducting a crusade against the infidels, an obsession which culminated in the unnecessary and suicidal action against the Moors of North Africa, where he was killed at the age of twenty-four in the disastrous battle of Alcázar Kebir leading a large national army which included the flower of the Portuguese nobility.

Ironically enough, after his death Sebastian became the hero of a messianic cult based on the popular belief that he was not dead and would return one misty morning to rule again, initiating a new age of splendour. This cult, which grew in political importance after the annexation of the Portuguese crown by Philip II of Spain, recalls similar millenarian legends about other “hidden kings” or emperors and has many parallels in history.⁴ When Camões finished *The Lusiads*, however, Sebastian was halfway through his reign and even though his reluctance to marry gave renewed concern about Portugal's future independence, he was looked to by his subjects to satisfy the hopes still held of him. Thus, when Camões, in the thirteen opening stanzas forming the dedication to Dom Sebastião (I.6-18), addresses him as “the timely-born guarantor of our ancient Lusitanian freedom” (I.6,1) and as “the foretold wonder of our age” (I.6,6) he is expressing both the national upsurge of joy at Sebastian's timely birth and the redemptive expectations deposited in the “Boy King”.

But the dedication also shows that Camões' own attitude to Dom Sebastião is complex and even ambivalent, reflecting some of the contemporary criticisms levelled at the king.⁵ Having called upon him to hear the praise of real-life heroes whose “worthy deeds have made them triumph over death” (I.2,6) he proceeds to expose the political realities underlying the poem's didactic purpose, addressing the king in terms which are remarkably outspoken for all their tone of homage:

E, enquanto eu estes canto, e a vós não posso,
Sublime Rei, que não me atrevo a tanto,
Tomai as rédeas vós do Reino vosso:
Dareis matéria a nunca ouvido canto.

(I.15, 1-4)

And while I sing of them and cannot sing of thee,
sublime king, for I am not so bold
take up the reins of this your kingdom
and furnish matter for a song as yet unheard.

Camões does not condemn the king outright, but he certainly makes it clear that he is reserving judgement. And he rounds off his dedication to Sebastian by telling him that Tethys, the sea goddess, wants him for her son-in-law and has already prepared "the realm of Ocean" as his dowry (I.16). Once again the gap between expectation and fulfilment is being exposed: like the taking up of the kingdom's reins, a symbolic marriage to the sea is in the hypothetical future. The full significance of this summons to action becomes evident in the last two Cantos, when the immortality of the heroes who have already deserved the praise of epic song is consecrated by Venus, and Tethys becomes the "bride" of Vasco da Gama. In order to deserve an equivalent reward, earning his place in the "temple of eternity" (I.17,8), the young king must first restore the spirit of the past, proving himself worthy not only of his royal forefathers and of the future song which will be sung to celebrate his future deeds, but also of the very song now being sung:

Mas, enquanto este tempo passa lento
De regerdes os povos, que o desejam,
Dai vós favor ao novo atrevimento,
Pera que estes meus versos vossos sejam,
E vereis ir cortando o salso argento
Os vossos Argonautas, por que vejam
Que são vistos de vós no mar irado;
E costumai-vos já a ser invocado.

(I.18)

But first the time must come when you will rule
the peoples who desire to be your subjects;
and meanwhile grant your favour to this new endeavour
so that these my verses yours may be.
Look, then, and you will see your Argonauts
ploughing the Ocean; and they will also know
that you behold them battling with the angry seas,
so be prepared to hear yourself invoked by them.

In this stanza, Camões relates the writing of the poem (the new endeavour) to the king's future role in ruling his people and then relates both to the evocation of the "new Argonauts" in mid-voyage, thus suggesting that it is Sebastian's task to connect past, present and future in a single whole, giving continuity to the great endeavour of the past which the poem celebrates. By making the living king both a witness and retrospective patron of Gama's voyage (the mariners will invoke him, knowing that he sees their struggles) he draws attention to the poem's didactic purpose just before he launches into the main narrative. It becomes clear that *The Lusiads* is being offered to its royal addressee as an exemplary lesson. For, like his contemporary Sir Philip Sydney, Camões held that poetry is to be valued as the most effective spur to heroic action. And if, as he says in Canto III apropos Dom Fernando, "a weak

king makes a strong people weak" ("um fraco rei faz fraca a forte gente" – III.138,8), a king whose mind is formed to noble virtue by studying suitable examples may yet revive the illustrious Lusan spirit.

Camões' conviction of the need for a new departure is based on his fears that the continuance of Portugal's past successes is threatened by the weaknesses of the Portuguese of his own day, which he exposes in the critical comments inserted throughout the poem. A similarly critical view of the state of the nation was expressed in a number of works written in Portuguese during the sixteenth century.⁶ Instances can be found in the plays of Gil Vicente and in the Arcadian poetry of Sá de Miranda and António Ferreira. Other writers, such as Gaspar Correia, Fernão Mendes Pinto and Diogo do Couto – who, like Camões, had first-hand experience of life in the East – denounced the abuses and errors of empire and castigated its corrupting effects on both the rulers and the ruled.

Diogo do Couto's *Soldado Prático* (a work whose full title can be translated as "Dialogue of the Practical Soldier: Illusions and Disillusions of India") is of particular interest for the light it throws on the poetic personality which Camões projects in his self-appointed role as royal counsellor and national mentor. In Couto's "vitriolic work" (the description is Professor Boxer's) a veteran soldier returns from India and presents himself at court in a "rustic and disorderly state" to denounce the harsh reality behind the deceptive appearance of respectability in the kingdom and empire. Insisting that he must bear witness, even if this should cost him his life, to the moral and social corruption consequent upon the greed for gold that motivates the Portuguese rulers of India, he expounds a humanist political and moral doctrine which could serve to remedy the ills he exposes.

The characterization of Diogo do Couto's honest soldier bears a marked resemblance to the *persona* which Camões assumes in the address to Dom Sebastião which closes *The Lusiads*. After summarizing the lessons to be learned from his poem and offering the king concrete advice on how to improve the existing state of affairs, Camões comments:

Mas eu que falo, humilde, baxo e rudo,
De vós não conhecido nem sonhado?
Da boca dos pequenos sei, contudo,
Que o louvor sai às vezes acabado;
Nem me falta na vida honesto estudo,
Com longa experiência misturado,
Nem engenho, que aqui vereis presente,
Cousas que juntas se acham raramente.

(X.154)

But who am I to speak, rough and low,
 unknown to you even in a dream?
 And yet I know that from the mouths of the humble
 the perfect tribute sometimes comes.
 My life has not lacked honest study
 combined with long experience;
 nor am I wanting in the art which you can see here present,
 qualities that are seldom found together.

Camões, like Diogo do Couto's veteran soldier, is adopting a traditionally modest stance to convey plain truths to his sovereign. And both Couto and Camões are using an equally traditional motif to point the moral that a rough and deceptively humble exterior may conceal true wisdom. This is a motif that occurs frequently in humanist Renaissance literature. In the dedicatory letter which prefaces his book, Couto specifically associates his soldier with the bucolic figure of the mythical Silenus. As Luís de Sousa Rebelo has shown, Couto was referring to one of the adages of Erasmus: *Sileni Alcibiades*.⁷ This adage was, in fact, patterned upon the philosophical adaptation of the Silenus myth in Plato's *Symposium*: a passage in which Alcibiades compares the wisdom of Socrates' speeches to the golden idols of gods concealed in the ugly clay images of Silenus.

In mythography Silenus, both primitive nature god and prophet-poet whose song moves all nature in rhythmic harmony, was the foster-father, tutor and constant companion of Bacchus, the god who embodies the spirit of the East and whose role in *The Lusíads* I shall be commenting on later in this lecture. His external appearance was that of a fat and drunken old satyr but his immense wisdom and his gift of prophecy, coupled with poetic eloquence and art, made him the personification of the true beauty and knowledge which is to be found by those who know how to seek beneath a deceptive exterior. Above all, his magical gift as a singer gave him the power to enchant men and bring them to transform themselves, if they were capable of understanding and interpreting his wisdom.

Camões makes it clear that he, too, has a deceptively humble exterior (lowly, rough, unknown) but combines the experience of the man of action with the eloquent art of the poet. Making full use of the humanist theme of the complementarity of arms and letters ("in one hand a sword, in the other a pen") he associates feats of arms with the achievements of poetry, and compares the actual writing of his poem to a long and perilous sea voyage, claiming for himself and his poem a status equivalent to that of the heroes and deeds he is celebrating (VII.78-82). The culminating moment in the development of this identification of the poet with his heroes comes in the last Canto when Camões includes his own rescue of the manuscript of *The Lusíads* among the "prophecies" of Tethys:⁸

"Este receberá, plácido e brando,
 No seu regaço o canto que molhado
 Vem do naufrágio triste e miserando,
 Dos procelosos baxos escapado,
 Das fomes, dos perigos grandes, quando
 Será o injusto mando executado
 Naquele cuja lira sonora
 Será mais afamada que ditosa.

(X.128)

"Here [that is, on the shores of the Mekong river] the soaking cantos of this poem will find harbour after the misery of shipwreck, having survived storms and shallows, privations and perils, in compliance with the unjust decree pronounced on one whose harmonious lyre is destined to bring him fame rather than fortune."
 (Atkinson)

By associating himself with the heroes celebrated in the poem he is writing, Camões suggests that his role as the soldier-poet who returned from a voyage semantically equivalent to Gama's has earned him the knowledge and status of a "Silenus" and entitles him to be the voice of his nation, interpreting its historical past in terms of his vision of the present and the future.

The Silenus motif, with its Virgilian pastoral associations, also provides a thematic link with the tone of pastoral regret that colours Camões' personal interventions in the narrative. In Virgil's Sixth Eclogue, the poet Tityrus, at Apollo's bidding, turns from epic subjects (kings and battles) to a pastoral theme, portraying a mythological scene in which Silenus sings the song of creation, recounting familiar legends in a historical sequence which shows man's decline from the golden age. Camões makes a brief but telling reference to both Silenus and Tityrus in his First Elegy, in which the barbarism of war and the futility of voyages is contrasted with the blessed peace of Arcadia.⁹

The contrast between epic and pastoral values is, in fact, the theme of the famous episode at the end of Canto IV (94-104) in which Camões uses the figure of a venerable old man to pronounce a Cassandra-like condemnation of Gama's undertaking just as the fleet is about to sail. He cries out against imperial ambition and its demoralising influence, denouncing the illusory vanity of fame and the moral corruption brought about by the lust for gold. In this passage, Camões shows us the other side of his epic subject, focusing explicitly on themes associated with the expulsion from Eden, the loss of the golden age and the decline into an age of iron and weapons ("idade de ferro e de armas" – IV.98,8).¹⁰ A pastoral shadow is cast upon the epic narrative. In the first stanzas, Camões affirmed that his subject called for the "grand resounding fury of the trumpet" ("a tuba canora e belicosa") rather than the music of the oaten flute ("a agreste avena ou frauta ruda" – I.5). But, in almost

every Canto, a private voice of longing and despair is heard behind the exultant epic voice, and the note of doubt and melancholy that runs through his poem makes its mood, at times, seem nearer to pastoral regret than to epic celebration.

Pastoral and epic themes are combined in the pagan mythological framework which Camões uses to relate the historical events narrated in *The Lusíads* to a higher supernatural order. In using a metaphysical background he is adhering to one of the conventions of epic poetry, which requires that the action move on two levels, human and divine. But his choice of the Olympian divinities – unique in Renaissance epic, though common in Renaissance pastoral – allows him to reconcile disparate moods and elements in a symbolically coherent whole.

The “divine” counterpart of the human struggle portrayed in *The Lusíads* is the struggle between Venus, who is determined to help the Portuguese, and Bacchus, who is equally determined to thwart them. Venus is aided by Mars and Jupiter (who succumbs to his daughter’s voluptuous charms when she pleads with him on behalf of her protégés) and Bacchus has the help of Neptune, god of the sea, symbolising that mutable power which the Portuguese are destined to conquer. Ironically, Bacchus was once associated with Portugal through his son or companion Lusus, the mythical ancestor of the Lusians. Camões calls him “Father Bacchus” when he makes his first appearance in the poem, complaining to Jupiter that his own feats in the East will be forgotten once the mariners reach India (I.30). But Bacchus is the false father, the father turned ogre who tries to devour his own children. For Bacchus, the god whose power is manifested in drunkenness and the orgiastic submission of reason to the senses, symbolizes all the obstacles which the Portuguese encounter in their voyage, creating violence and disorder in the elements and instigating suspicion and hatred among the non-Christian peoples they meet.

Faria e Sousa – the first and still one of the best commentators of *The Lusíads* – identifies Bacchus specifically with the Devil.¹¹ It is true that Camões makes Bacchus an evil demon and the guardian power of the heathen world. But Bacchus also represents the unredeemed malignant forces in human nature associated with the neo-platonic conception of “base love” which is essentially “lack of love”.¹² This suggests a wider range of reference than the specifically Christian connotations of the Devil. In this wider sense, the conflict between Venus and Bacchus reflects the strife between opposites representing the chief powers of existence: love/hatred, light/dark, harmony/chaos, good/evil, etcetera.

As the embodiment of love in its widest neo-platonic sense, Venus combines the spiritual attributes of “Aphrodite Urania” (the “heavenly” or “celestial” Venus) with the carnal sensuality and licentiousness of Venus the

Harlot, or “Aphrodite Porne”. In her, Camões reconciles the Christian conflict between spiritual and physical love, a conflict much exacerbated by the Counter-Reformation. It was the spiritual aspect of Camões’ Venus that allowed Faria e Sousa to see her, even in the puritanical 1630s, as a personification of Christianity, an identification reinforced by the Marian echoes in her attributes as the Celestial Venus. But the Venus who responds to the pious Christian prayers which Gama addresses to the “Divine Guardian” in Cantos II and VI (“Divina Guarda, angélica, celeste”) is the same Venus, who, in Canto IX, conjures up a magical island in which to reward the homeward-bound mariners, “refreshing their tired humanity” by giving them the amorous company of her nymphs. The erotic revels of the nymphs and mariners in the Arcadian setting of this *locus amoenus* can be seen, on one level, as a crude wish-fulfilment, an extended fantasy projection of a sexual encounter between prostitutes and sailors in any of the world’s ports. But Camões makes their sensual experience a prelude to the divine revelations which transform the mariners into “enlightened heroes” (IX.95,7). In Canto X, after the universal love-making of the Island, one of Venus’s nymphs assumes the role of prophetess and tells the mariners of the future deeds of the Portuguese which she has learned from the sea god Proteus (X.7-73). Gama himself enters an even higher plane of spiritual knowledge when Tethys shows him the vision of the *Machina Mundi* and explains the structure of the universe.

In his multi-layered account of the Island of Love, Camões is thus offering the unorthodox suggestion that eroticism, when properly channelled, is a means of expressing high spiritual aspirations. His lyric poetry provides ample evidence that he always sought to reconcile the erotic and the spiritual. Indeed, one of its most novel features is its attempt to repudiate the traditional opposition between “appetite” and “reason”.¹³ In *The Lusíads*, the voluptuous pleasures of the island which Venus prepares for the mariners are represented as morally positive and spiritually regenerating, unlike the destructive or deceptive erotic delights of similar enchanted islands or magical gardens, like Calypso’s island in the *Odyssey* or Alcina’s garden in Ariosto’s *Orlando Furioso*.¹⁴ In this, Camões may be reflecting the epicurean Renaissance ethos which postulated the conjoining of three realms of being in the universal man: action, contemplation and delight (*vita activa*, *vita contemplativa* and *vita voluptuosa*). In accordance with this ethos, the Three Graces (the attendants of Venus) represented the three paths which led universal man to true happiness, combining power, wisdom and pleasure.¹⁵

The beneficent power of Venus as the embodiment of a regenerating love in which flesh and spirit can be reconciled is the counterpart of her power as the celestial guide whose providential interventions save Gama and the mariners from the perils plotted by Bacchus. These two aspects of Venus converge in the creation of her Island where Gama’s historical voyage becomes a symbolic voyage of initiation into true happiness. The voyage thus culminates not with the arrival of the mariners in India – its historical purpose

– but with their arrival on the Island of Venus where Love, the power that has guided them throughout, reveals the symbolic significance of their achievement, rewarding them with a “high prophetic knowledge” of their nation’s destiny in a vision “denied to the vain science of wretched mortal men” (X.76,4).

The use of this prophetic device enables Camões to bring into the poem an account of historical events up to his own time. In the symbolic design of *The Lusads*, this vision, in which the future is prophetically encompassed in the past, is the objective towards which the whole poem has been moving: it is here that Camões effects the transmutation of history into destiny. And though at the end of Canto IX he explicitly states that the nymphs and the Island are simply an emblem of glory – “nothing but the honours which make life sublime” (IX.89) – he is no less explicit when, in the same passage, he tells his contemporaries that if they “waken from the ignoble sleep which makes a slave of the free soul” (IX.92,7) curbing their ambitious greed and the “detestable vice of tyranny and base oppression” (IX.93,1-4), they will join the noble company of the “enlightened heroes” of the past and will be received in that same Island of Venus (IX.95,6-8).

As the nodal point where past and future coalesce, the earthly paradise of the Island of Venus is a timeless ideal place where love is eternally restored as the centre of the world’s harmony.¹⁶ That the didactic value of the Island has a topical contemporary reference which its timelessness serves to accentuate, is illustrated in the lengthy passage in Canto IX (21-50) in which Camões describes its preparation. Since her nymphs must be smitten with love for the mariners, Venus needs the help of Cupid, the providential god in the pastoral machine.¹⁷ She finds him marshalling a force of lesser cupids for an expedition against rebellious mankind which has fallen into “grave error” by “giving its heart to things meant to be used, not loved” (IX.25). Acteon – the mythical hunter changed into a stag and torn to pieces by his hounds – is cited as an example of the world’s errors: “so austere in his devotion to the hunt, so blinded by this mad and brutish sport” that he flees from human company to follow “ugly, savage beasts”. For this primal sin – the rejection of love itself – Cupid decides to punish Acteon by showing him Diana’s naked beauty. “And let him beware”, comments Camões, “lest the dogs he loves devour him” (IX.26).¹⁸

The immediate topicality of Acteon’s sin is made clear by the juxtaposition of this reference with an account of corruption and injustice in high places: “All over the world there are princes unconcerned with the public good because they love only themselves, surrounded by counsellors who offer adulation, making it impossible to clear the stripling wheat of weeds” (IX.27). The Acteon-like prince whom Camões has in mind is Dom Sebastião, who sins against love both in the narrow sense of rejecting women and marriage, and in the broader sense of neglecting the public good, a topic developed in the

stanzas that follow, which show that neglect of public duty amounts to a rejection of *caritas patriae* (love of country) so dear to civic humanism. Camões is once more cautioning the king against his neglect of the kingdom, reflected in his obsessive love of hunting and his excessive dependence on bad counsellors who, like Acteon’s hounds, may yet devour him. To quote Faria e Sousa’s expressive comment on this passage, “the poet stands before King Sebastian like John the Baptist before Herod, condemning his ways”.¹⁹

The function of Cupid’s crusade against those who have brought disorder into the world by sinning against Love becomes symbolically equivalent to the function of the Island when Venus persuades him to direct his attentions to the preparation of the earthly paradise where love and harmony will “correct the errors” of the “base and wicked world which dared to challenge Cupid’s power” (IX.42,3-4). And, as if to accentuate this functional equivalence, a regenerated Acteon is included among the Island’s many marvels:

Ao longo da água o nívelo cisne canta;
Responde-lhe do ramo filomela;
Da sombra de seus cornos não se espanta
Acteon, na água cristalina e bela;
(IX.63,1-4)

Along the lake the snowy swan did sing,
Him Philomela answers from a Bough;
Acteon drinks out of a crystal spring,
Nor fears the shadow of his horned brow.
(Fanshawe)

Just as the “mad and brutish” sport of hunting is transformed into the pursuit of love (the mariners cry “what strange game we have here!” when they see the nymphs) so Acteon, redeemed by what the island represents, no longer fears the horns of his sexuality.

The redemptive function of the Island of Love is epitomized in the role played by Tethys, the goddess Venus chooses for Vasco da Gama. According to myth, Tethys was the daughter of Earth and Sky and, as the wife of Neptune, she personified the sea. In the legends associated with Bacchus, it was Tethys who gave him refuge in the depths of the Ocean when he was forced to flee from Thrace after returning from his conquest of the East. The mythical bond between the two deities, which explains the passage in Canto VI of *The Lusads* when Tethys champions the cause of Bacchus, provides a measure of the enormous symbolic value to be placed on her change of heart. Her amorous submission to Gama and her desire to marry one of her daughters to King Sebastian thus symbolizes not only Portugal’s eternal union with the sea, but also the triumph of regenerating love over the unregenerate power of base love.

The "conversion" of Tethys makes her a suitable mouthpiece for the "high prophecy" of Canto X. Since the revelation of the order and harmony of the universe is couched in Christian terms, preceded by the explanation that she and the other Olympian divinities are fables and that the one true God works through second causes, it can be said that Tethys embodies the grace granted to those delivered from the "infernal darkness" ("a treva escura") of falsehood.²⁰ It is this aspect of Tethys which provides the thematic link with the ten stanzas of Canto X (109-119) in which she gives an account of the evangelical mission of St. Thomas the Apostle who, according to legend, brought Christianity to India and died there as a martyr. The Christian imperialism that comes into the foreground at this point in the poem reflects the European religious climate of the time and, more specifically, the crusading sense of mission of the Portuguese monarchy. We should recall that the Turkish advance into Europe was a very real threat until the naval victory of Lepanto in 1571, when Camões had already finished his poem. The seriousness of the situation is stressed in the long diatribe in Canto VII in which he denounces the leading nations of Europe for their failure to champion the Christian cause against the menacing forces of Islam, leaving Portugal to keep up a solitary fight in defence of Christianity. The restoration of harmony to a disordered world would have to include the triumph of European Christianity. It is not by chance that the idea of a united European crusade against the heathen provided the inspiration for the other great epic of the period, Tasso's *Jerusalem Delivered*, published after *The Lusíads*, in 1575.

The association of love and harmony with the crusading spirit allows Camões to justify imperial war as an instrument of love. But despite his justification, he was too much of a humanist not to reveal the reality behind the idealization: the barbarity of war becomes evident in the very terms he uses to characterize the triumphs of arms in spreading the Christian faith, which recall the tone of his First Elegy. The peaceful mission of St. Thomas may represent the spiritual alternative to his brutality. But Camões never really forgets that without wars there would be no empires and that Portugal was engaged in fulfilling an imperial mission.

The contrast between war and peace is essentially a contrast between the moral perspectives represented by the epic and pastoral modes. As we have seen, the old man who denounces the demoralising consequences of empire does so in terms which relate the epic values of fame and glory to man's decline from the pastoral innocence of the golden age. In pastoral, the image of the golden age is conventionally used to make indirect comments on contemporary issues by contrasting its idealized perfections with the "iron age" of the present. The same distancing device is used for the thinly disguised topical criticisms embedded in the imaginary "nowheres" where ideal commonwealths are contrasted with existing laws, politics, morals, etcetera. In terms of their didactic value, Arcadias and Utopias are semantically equivalent, the spatial concept of one finding a temporal counterpart in the other.

The characterisation of the Island of Love, with its idyllic sylvan landscape, combines the conventional Arcadian images (the heavily-laden fruit trees, the lush pastures, the nymphs bathing in crystal streams . . .) with the traditional associations of the golden age: nature producing of its own accord without the need for cultivation, the tameness of wild animals, the swan and the nightingale singing in harmony, etcetera. But Camões also makes it encompass the redemptive and regenerative imagery associated with Cupid's crusade, contrasting the "errors of the world" with the restoration of harmony through love. And he makes clear that he intends all this to be seen as a paradigmatic example for his own time: the Island and the nymphs are there for his contemporaries when they learn to correct their errors and, in the same spirit, Tethys has prepared the realm of ocean as a dowry for Dom Sebastião. Thus Venus' Island, a convergence of golden age myth and pastoral idyll, serves a functional purpose similar to that of the imaginary islands used by Renaissance utopians to criticize their own societies.²¹ In this context it is worth noting that João de Barros, whose chronicles of empire were used by Camões as one of the historical sources for *The Lusíads*, refers to Sir Thomas More's *Utopia* in his Third Decade of *Asia*. Describing it as "a modern fable", he comments: "He used it to teach the English how to govern themselves".²² It might be said that Camões is using the Island of Venus to teach the Portuguese how to live. His main concern is not with the loss of the golden age but with the restoration of a sense of purpose for the future, a concern grounded in his criticism of the present. By projecting an Arcadian idealization of the lost golden age into a redemptive vision encompassing the heroes of the future, he is adapting the conventional uses of pastoral retrospection to the purposes of epic exhortation.

Virgil, in his mysterious Fourth Eclogue, had also removed the traditional images of the golden age from their retrospective context and adapted them to new purposes, in this case the purpose of prophetic exhortation. The so-called "prophetic" or "messianic" eclogue, whose many reverberations have been perplexing its commentators for two thousand years, announces the coming of a divine child "with whom the iron age will cease and a golden race spring up all over the world" (8-9). Whether identified with the coming of a Messiah or with a specific Roman ruler, in the context of the Eclogue the child seems to symbolize the organizing spirit of a new age in which human society will be perfected, in a historical pattern which reverses the traditional sequence of decline, looking upward and onward to a time of cyclical regeneration. Many Renaissance poets used this Virgilian model to flatter a ruler.²³ I would suggest that Camões had in mind the deeper redemptive sense of the Eclogue when faced with the historical circumstances of Portugal, relating the role assigned by Virgil to his "Divine Child" to the expectations deposited in the boy king Sebastião, "The Desired One". There may even be a subliminal association between Virgil's "golden race of the future" and the "strong and lively progeny" ("progénie forte e bela") that Venus hopes to create by "marrying" her nymphs to the Portuguese mariners (IX.42,1-2).

In his lyric poetry, Camões often uses elements of the tradition he is ostensibly imitating to subvert that tradition even as he pays it homage. So in his epic, he takes the Virgilian model and transforms it to suit his own purposes, producing what is in some respects an anti-*Aeniad*: an epic of doubt rather than affirmation, of criticism rather than praise; an epic in which the timeless vision of the golden age becomes a Utopian dream island. Virgil could still believe in the restoration of the golden age in his own time and, in Book VI of the *Aeniad* he specifically associates it with the reign of Augustus Caesar.²⁴ For Camões, however, the vision of the golden age is more of a wishful project than a prophetic affirmation. Even his final exhortation to Dom Sebastião to accept the lessons of the poem and give a new epic significance to his country's history fails to offset the profoundly elegiac tone of his last two personal interventions, which precede and follow the prophetic visions of the Nymph and Tethys, thus placing these within the context of his disillusioned comments on corruption and injustice. In the first of the two passages (X.8-9), which begins on an autumnal and melancholy note, he asks his Muse to give him back the joy of writing so that he may yet accomplish what he desires for his nation. In his final intervention he tells the Muse to stop, for his lyre is out of tune and his voice is hoarse, not from singing but because he realizes that he is singing to a "deaf and hardened people" lost in the grimness of a mean and morally debilitating sadness:

No'mais, Musa, no'mais, que a lira tenho
Destemperada e a voz enrouquecida,
E não do canto, mas de ver que venho
Cantar a gente surda e endurecida.
O favor com que mais se acende o engenho,
Não no dá a Pátria, não, que está metida
No gosto da cobiça e na rudeza
Dũa austera, apagada e vil tristeza.

(X.145)

In his novel combination of epic celebration and pastoral regret, Camões thus brought into *The Lusíads* a new and disturbing element alien to the traditional spirit of epic: a modern sense of doubt which is central to his complex vision of history, realistically understood as a composite of ambiguities. His longing to associate his king with a new golden age is undermined by the painful personal knowledge of the moral and social cost of such triumphs. His epic, based on a wisdom gained from the combination of "honest study and long experience" is, finally, in the conditional mood, disclosing the empty space which only history could fulfil.

Helder Macedo
King's College London
15 November 1983

- I Editions
Luís de Camões, *Os Lusíadas*, edited with an introduction and notes by Frank Pierce, Oxford, 1973.
Luís de Camões, *Os Lusíadas*, edited with an introduction and notes by Emanuel Paulo Ramos, 3rd edition, Porto.
- II Translations
Fanshawe: *The Lusíad* by Luís de Camoens, translated by Richard Fanshawe. Edited with an introduction by Jeremiah D. M. Ford, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1940.
Atkinson: *Camoens, The Lusíads*, translated with an introduction by William C. Atkinson, Penguin Books, London, 1952 (3rd reprint 1980).
- III Notes
1 Roger Bismut emphasizes the novel use of the poet's personal voice in *The Lusíads* in *La Lyrique de Camões*, Paris, 1970, and *Les Lusíades de Camões, Confession d'un Poète*, Paris, 1974. Cf. also Jorge de Sena, *A Estrutura de Os Lusíadas*, Lisbon, 1970, and Thomas R. Hart, "The Author's Voice in *The Lusíads*", *Hispanic Review*, 44, 1976, pp 45-55. On the functional use of the personal voice in the poem see Helder Macedo, *Camões e a Viagem Iniciática*, Lisbon, 1980, and "O Braço e a Mente: o Poeta como Herói n'Os Lusíadas" in *Camões, Arquivos do Centro Cultural Português*, vol. XVI, Paris, 1981; and Eduardo Lourenço, *Poesia e Metafísica*, Lisbon, 1983 (pp 31-49).
2 C. M. Bowra, *From Virgil to Milton*, London, 1945, p 28.
3 Cf. C. R. Boxer, *The Portuguese Seaborne Empire*, London, 1969, pp 51-56; and H. V. Livermore, *A New History of Portugal*, Cambridge, 1966, pp 150-151 and 168-169.
4 On the personal circumstances of Dom Sebastião see Queiroz Velloso, *D. Sebastião*, 3rd edition, Lisbon, 1945. The Messianic cult centering on the figure of Dom Sebastião has many parallels outside Portugal: the legends associated with the two Holy Roman Emperors, Frederick Barbarossa and his grandson Frederick II, provide one of many possible examples. Sebastianism itself fits into the prophetic tradition associated with Joachim of Fiore, reinforced by the Jewish Messianism which flourished in the Iberian Peninsula after the Expulsion. For a stimulating study of European Messianism (which would have been considerably enriched by the inclusion of the significant Portuguese example) see Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium*, London, 1975, in particular Chapter 6, "The Emperor Frederick as Messiah" (pp 108-118). On the persistence of Sebastianism, specifically in Brazil during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, see René Ribeiro, "Brazilian Messianic Movements" in *Millennial Dreams in Action*, ed. by Sylvia L. Thrupp, New York, 1970, pp 55-69.
5 Cf. Alfonso Danvila, *Felipe II y el Rey D. Sebastian de Portugal*, Madrid, 1954. Also António Sérgio, "Camões Panfletário (Camões e Dom Sebastião)" in *Ensaio*, vol. 4, Lisbon.
6 Cf. José V. de Pina Martins, "L'Humanisme dans l'Oeuvre de Camões", in *Camões à la Renaissance*, Université Libre de Bruxelles, ed. Centre Culturel Portugais, Paris, 1983, (pp 28-30): "Les Lusíades doivent beaucoup à l'Humanisme européen et à ceux qu'il avait formés, les humanistes Portugais de la première moitié du XVI^e Siècle (...). Camões est le chantre du passé, mais non pour autant un 'laudator temporis acti', car il ne célèbre les actes des héros d'autrefois que dans la mesure où ils se prolongent dans l'avenir (...). En ce qui concerne le présent, il critique la 'apagada e vil tristeza' d'une époque où son génie est méconnu, où l'on néglige les vraies valeurs pour honorer la médiocrité. La critique sociale camonienne va dans le sens de la satire humaniste, de Pétrarque à Erasme: elle dénonce l'ambition démesurée, l'égoïsme individuel, les intrigues et l'envie, la mesquinerie, le népotisme, la promotion des incompetents (...). C'est son amour de la patrie, prenant une dimension universelle, qui lui inspire le cri de la protestation civique". On the critical element in *The Lusíads* see also José Filguera Valverde, *Camoens*, Barcelona, 1958, pp 252-253; and Helder Macedo, *Camões e a Viagem Iniciática*, Lisbon, 1980, pp 33-59.
7 Luís de Sousa Rebelo, "Armas e Letras", *Grande Dicionário da Literatura Portuguesa* (Lisbon, 1970-) pp 426-452, and *A Tradição Clássica na Literatura Portuguesa*, Lisbon, 1982, pp 224-230. In this book Luís de Sousa Rebelo seems to accept the association of the persona used

- by Camões in *The Lusíads* with Silenus (p 46). I first suggested this association in my study of Camões and the Initiatory Voyage, Lisbon, 1980, pp 57-68. The extent to which the Silenus motif became central to European Renaissance thought can be gauged from the fact that Rabelais uses it as the theme of his Prologue to the First Book of *Gargantua and Pantagruel*.
- 8 Luciana Stegagno Picchio provides an insightful perspective on autobiographical elements in the work of Camões: "O Canto Molhado: Contributo para o estudo das biografias Camonianas" in Camões, *Arquivos do Centro Cultural Português*, vol. XVI, Paris, 1981, pp 243-265.
 - 9 Camões' First Elegy is also known as the "Simonides Elegy" from its first line: "O poeta Simonides, falando" (. . .). In it, Camões refers to his own sea voyage to India and associates his own past life with a lost bucolic golden age, contrasting it with the war-like present in which he finds himself. Cf. in particular lines 142 to 192. The reference to Tityrus and Silenus is in line 190.
 - 10 Peter Marinelli makes the following perceptive comment: "To associate pastoral with the golden age is inevitably to associate heroic poetry, at the other end of the literary scale, with the world of degeneration. If voyages and quests, warfare, soldiering and plundering are the effects of a degeneration, the very literature in which these activities are mirrored, however glamorous with heroism, is itself a testimony of a degeneration. Renaissance authors are always alert to the fact, but no one faced it more squarely or more courageously than Camões. In his *Lusíads*, the majestic national epic of Portugal, at the very moment when the great expedition of Vasco da Gama, fraught with magnificent destiny, is about to sail (Canto 4), a nameless old man passionately cries out against the entire undertaking, revealing at one and the same time that his creator was aware of a darker side to the heroic gesture and had the artistic integrity to make it part of his total vision (. . .)". Peter V. Marinelli, *Pastoral, The Critical Idiom*, London, 1971, pp 17-18.
 - 11 Frank Pierce acknowledges the force of Faria e Sousa's arguments in favour of identifying Bacchus with the Devil in his article "The place of mythology in *The Lusíads*", in *Comparative Literature*, 6, 1954, pp 97-122 (p 111).
 - 12 The Camonian concept of "base love" is exemplified in the episode of the giant Adamastor (Canto V). Cf. Helder Macedo, *op.cit.*, pp 42-47.
 - 13 Cf. Helder Macedo, *op.cit.*, pp 17-20 and "Appetite into Reason: Love as Experience in the Lyric Poetry of Camões", *Camões, Some Poems*, London, 1976.
 - 14 In Tasso's *Jerusalem Delivered*, the enchanted palace and garden of the enchantress Armida is situated in the "Fortunate Islands beyond the ocean". In his study of the Island of Love archetype, Stephen Reckert suggests that the Island of Venus in *The Lusíads* is a metamorphosis of Venus herself. Cf. "A Ilha dos Amores (Iconografia dum Arquétipo)", *Camões, Arquivos do Centro Cultural Português*, vol. XVI, Paris, 1981, pp 191-200. See also his "A Ilha dos Amores: Metáfora e Metonímia", in *A Viagem de 'Os Lusíadas': Símbolo e Mito*, ed. by Y. K. Centeno and Stephen Reckert, Lisbon, 1981.
 - 15 Cf. Harry Levin, *The Myth of the Golden Age in the Renaissance*, Oxford, 1972, pp 134-135.
 - 16 Cf. Jorge de Sena, *A Estrutura de Os Lusíadas*, Lisbon, 1970, p 67: "On the mythical level (. . .) the creation of the Island of Love for the mariners represents a decisive moment in the narrative: the war which love was about to wage against the world's disorder announced by the random shots of 'the clumsy cupids'. The Island thus represents the restoration of Harmony so that the consecration and mythical transfiguration of the heroes achieved in and through the Island is also, and above all, the restoration of love, true love, as the centre of the world's harmony." (My translation)
 - 17 The expression is Harry Levin's: "Amore or Cupid, the providential god in the pastoral machine", *op.cit.*, p 45.
 - 18 Aguiar e Silva rightly links Acteon's error and the theme of the world's disorder to the neo-platonic conception of love: "Acteon heads the examples of the world's disorder because he is guilty of the first and basic sin against love: the rejection of love itself, embodied in the rejection of women" (my translation); Victor Manuel de Aguiar e Silva, *Função e Significado do Episódio da 'Ilha dos Amores' na Estrutura de 'Os Lusíadas'*, Lisbon, 1972, p 11. See also Américo da Costa Ramalho, "O Mito de Acteon em Camões" in *Humanitas*, vols. XIX-XX, Coimbra, 1968; and Eduardo Lourenço, *op.cit.*, pp 11-30.
 - 19 "Se 'pone delante del rey Don Sebastian, como un Bautista delante de Herodes a condenarle sus costumbres". Manuel Faria e Sousa, *Lusíadas de Luís de Camões*, Lisbon, 1972, Vol.II, Canto IX, Tomo 4, p 53.
 - 20 The reference to the "infernal darkness" of heathendom occurs in Canto IX, 15, 5-6:

Oh ditoso Africano, que a clemência
Divina assim tirou de escura treva!

O happy African, whom Providence
Divine out of infernal darkness drew.
(Fanshawe)
 - 21 The Utopian significance of the Island of Love is central to the analysis of the episode in Jacinto do Prado Coelho's article "'A Ilha dos Amores': Conjuncções e Dissonâncias" in *Camões, Arquivos do Centro Cultural Português*, vol. XVI, Paris, 1981, pp 181-189. He calls it the "macro-episode" of the "divine island" and characterizes it as "a paradigmatic example for a corrupt world", highlighting what he sees as the poet's fundamental paradox: the fact that "the peace which Camões extols and represents in the Island of Love, a peace compounded of love and justice, is carried on the point of the sword to a world which must be conquered". He also comments on the pre-lapsarian character of the Island of Love where the "noble progeny" which Venus dreams of producing from the union of her nymphs with the mariners will come from a Utopian marriage between "the sons of earth and the daughters of the sea (i.e. from Nature before the Fall)". He notes, too, that in the poet's imagination the island is situated not in a historical time but in an indefinite future, seen from the perspective of a disappointing present. He suggests that the "enigma of the Island of Love" resides in "the clash between the ideal and the real, in the shadows of the conflict between the crusading spirit in the service of a dogmatic and imperious nationalism and the warm humanism of one of the great men of the Renaissance, the open-minded, generous and lucid Camões" (pp 188-189). In his book *A Tradição Clássica na Literatura Portuguesa*, Luís de Sousa Rebelo suggests that "the Island of Venus also belongs to the kingdom of Renaissance utopianism" (*op.cit.*, p 51).
 - 22 The reference is in the Prologue to the Third Decade of João de Barros' *Asia* (ed. Hernani Cidade, Lisbon, 1946, p 9). Cf. Fernando de Mello Moser in *Tomás More e os Caminhos da Perfeição Humana*, Lisbon, 1982.
 - 23 Harry Levin gives numerous instances of the use of the Virgilian eclogue as official eulogy by Renaissance poets among others. *Op.cit.*, Ch.I (pp 3-31).
 - 24

Hic vir, hic est, tibi quem promitti saepius audis,
Augustus Caesar, Divi genus, aurea condet
saecula qui rursus Latio regnata per arva
Saturno quondam, super et Garamantas et Indos
proferet imperium (iacet extra sidera tellus,
extra anni solisque vias, ubi caelifer Atlas
axem umero torquet stellis ardentibus aptum);
Lines 791-797.

This, this is he, whom thou so oft hearest
promised to thee, Augustus Caesar, son of a
god, who shall again set up the Golden Age
amid the fields where Saturn once reigned,
and shall spread his empire past Garamant and
Indian, to a land that lies beyond the stars,
beyond the paths of the year and the sun,
where heaven-bearing Atlas turns on his
shoulders the sphere, inset with gleaming stars.

Virgil, *Eclogues, Georgics, Aenid 1-6* (vol.I of
Loeb Classical Library *Virgil* with an English
translation by H. R. Fairclough), pp 560-563.