

# VIRGIL, CAMÕES AND THE CLASSICAL EPIC TRADITION<sup>1</sup>

M.R. Mezzabotta, University of Cape Town

Of all works inspired by Virgil's *Aeneid*, the *Lusiads* (*Os Lusíadas*) of the Portuguese poet Luís Vaz de Camões (c. 1524/5-1580) must rank as the boldest and most imaginative. This masterly poem, constructed around the momentous voyage in which Vasco da Gama discovered the sea route from Europe to India via the Cape of Good Hope in 1497-1498, deserves to be more widely known outside Portugal than is presently the case,<sup>2</sup> especially amongst teachers and students of classical epic poetry who live in South Africa. For this audience the *Lusiads* furnishes insights into a turning-point in the history of the African subcontinent, as well as evidence of how the classical epic literary tradition, received and transmitted by Virgil, shaped the form and content of a poem composed some sixteen centuries after Virgil's death.

The voyage of da Gama opened up the East and its rich spice markets to European trade, by a route which avoided dealings with Venetian, Turkish and Arab middlemen. It laid the foundations of the Portuguese empire and trading interests in the Orient, most of which were taken over by the Dutch, following the decline of Portuguese influence towards the end of the sixteenth century and the establishment of the Dutch East India Company in 1602. Fifty years later, Jan van Riebeeck set up a victualling station in Cape Town, to supply the Company's ships travelling to and from India. This led to the settlement and development of Southern Africa by Europeans.<sup>3</sup>

The *Lusiads* was intended by its author to inspire his contemporaries to emulate the glorious achievements of their ancestors and to see themselves as part of a divinely ordained mission to spread Portuguese dominion and the Catholic faith throughout the world. As such mighty subject matter demanded, Camões composed his poem in the form of an epic, modelling it specifically on Virgil's *Aeneid*, the purpose of which had been similar: to fire its readers with a proper sense of their duty as divinely destined rulers of the world. The poem's title (*Os Lusíadas*) means "the descendants of Lusus", making the Portuguese themselves the collective hero of the epic through their links

---

<sup>1</sup> I am grateful for helpful suggestions received from Carlos Gomes da Silva, of the Portuguese department of the University of Cape Town, and from the anonymous referee of *Akroterion*.

<sup>2</sup> There is not a great deal in the way of secondary literature available to recommend to English-speaking readers. I have used the text of Pierce (1981), which provides an introduction and brief notes in English, and consulted the Portuguese edition of Ramos (1966). Several translations into English verse have been made, beginning with that of Fanshaw (1655), but the prose version with useful introduction by Atkinson (1952), published in the Penguin Classics series, will probably be the easiest to obtain. Burton (1881) and Freitas (1963) provide book-length discussions in English and essays are offered by Bowra (1945), Crum (1953), Macedo (1983) and Tate (1986). Cidade (1961) and Valverde (1981) provide broad discussions of Camões' life and work in Portuguese. Readers should not, however, be discouraged by the relative lack of secondary literature, as the poem speaks for itself.

<sup>3</sup> For the historical background see Boxer (1969) and Axelson (1973).

with Lusus, the mythical companion of the god Bacchus. Camões represents Lusus as having settled in and given his name to the area which became the Roman province of Lusitania (cf. *Lus.* 1.39; 3.21; 8.2). The Portuguese prided themselves that they, alone of Rome's Iberian provinces, had preserved their own identity and independence, whereas the provinces of Gallaecia, Tarracona and Baetica had subsequently been incorporated into a unified Spain. In his choice of title Camões deliberately recalls the title of Virgil's *Aeneid* (= "poem about Aeneas") and makes a two-fold declaration of artistic intent: the poem is to be a continuation of the classical epic tradition while its plural subject prepares the reader for a narrative focused on a whole nation of heroes.

Camões himself was a soldier and adventurer as well as a prolific poet. His poetry reflects both the classical influence of his Renaissance education and a profound awareness of the historical achievements and national character of the Portuguese in the sixteenth century. His work may be catalogued as follows:

- The *Lusiads*, an epic poem in ten cantos composed in stanzas of eight lines (Port. *oitavas*),<sup>4</sup> published in 1572;
- *Lyric poems*, of which Camões left a large and varied output. This included sonnets, odes, verse epistles, elegies, eclogues and *redondilhas* (lyric poems composed in the octosyllabic metre native to Portugal and Spain) and spans the whole of his productive life, from his student days to the disillusionment of his last years. Most of these miscellaneous lyrics were published only after his death;
- Three plays (*El-Rei Seleuco*, *Os Anfitriões* and *Filodemo*), youthful works which exhibit the dual influence of Plautus and the bilingual (Spanish/Portuguese) dramatist Gil Vicente (c. 1465-1536). All were published posthumously;
- A few prose letters survive from what must have been an extensive correspondence.<sup>5</sup>

Reliable biographical information about Camões is scarce. Although Camões undoubtedly drew on his own experiences in composing his poetry, a substantial amount of what has been claimed as fact by his early biographers depends not on verifiable documentation but on selective and often inventive interpretation of passages from his work. (Classicists will recognise this as a problem pertaining also to the *Lives* of early Greek poets). More recent scholarly research has, however, yielded a reasonably trustworthy outline of his life. Camões' family was Galician in origin, his great-great-grandfather Vasco Perez de Camoens having settled in Portugal towards the end of the fourteenth century. His father, Simão Vaz de Camoes, was a ship's captain. His mother's name is variously recorded as Ana de Sá or Ana de Macedo or a combination of both surnames. Luís appears to have been his parents' only child, never married and left no children. At the time of his birth in 1524/5, either in Lisbon

---

<sup>4</sup> Camões borrowed this verse from Italian poetry. It had the invariable rhyme scheme a b a b c c.

<sup>5</sup> In addition to these works a brief notice survives of a philosophical poem, the *Parnaso*. The historian Diogo de Couto found Camões working on this in Mozambique in 1569. This poem was subsequently stolen from Camões and never recovered.

or Coimbra, his family enjoyed aristocratic connections but was of restricted means. He received the classical and humanistic education of the time, probably at Coimbra.

Camões' works testify to the enormous erudition, drawn from a number of cultures, that he must have acquired during his years of study. He had an intimate knowledge of Latin literature, especially of poets such as Horace, Ovid, Lucan, Statius and, of course, Virgil. He probably learned some Greek, although the principal Greek authors who influenced him, Homer and Plato, were available to him in Latin translations.<sup>6</sup> All his work is steeped in Graeco-Roman thought and in allusions to pagan classical mythology. Camões also knew Italian and was influenced by Italian literature. His compatriot Francisco de Sá de Miranda (1480-1558) had studied in Italy for many years and in 1526 brought back knowledge of Italian metres and of the sonnet form developed by Petrarch. The debt to Italian culture is reflected in the many sonnets composed by Camões and in his use of *ottava rima* (Port. *oitavas*) in some lyric poetry as well as in the *Lusiads*. He also had a profound knowledge of Spanish and Portuguese poetry, as seen in his adaptation of Gil Vicente's bilingual dramas and in the *redondilhas* which form part of his lyric output.

By 1542 Camões was living in Lisbon, where he moved on the fringes of court society. At this period he composed a great deal of lyric poetry and is reputed to have had a passionate but hopeless love affair. In 1547 he went to Ceuta in Morocco where he lost his right eye in combat against the Moors. Returning to Lisbon in 1549 he seems to have thrown himself into a life of ephemeral pleasures which came to an abrupt end when, on the feast of Corpus Christi in June 1552, he was imprisoned for injuring a minor court official in a brawl. Fortunately his victim recovered and Camões was released in March 1553, on payment of a fine and on the understanding that he should serve the King in India.

Dejected and resentful, he sailed from Lisbon almost immediately. The long and dangerous voyage to Goa, the principal port on the west coast of India, was used as the basis for his description of Vasco da Gama's voyage in the *Lusiads*. Camões' initial pleasure at arriving in Goa was soon replaced by disillusionment with Goa and its inhabitants. He took part in an expedition organised by the Viceroy against the King of Chembe off the coast of Malibar. In the following year, 1553, he campaigned in the Red Sea against Turkish merchant shipping. The next thirteen years were spent mostly in Goa, where awareness of the corruption of Goan society, homesickness for Portugal and his vision of the greatness he believed Portugal could achieve produced some of his finest poetry, comprising satirical criticisms, nostalgic lyrics and, above all, the *Lusiads*.

In 1556 he was appointed to a minor administrative post in Macau (China), where there was a sizeable Portuguese community, visiting Malacca and probably the Moluccas on the way. But he was soon recalled to Goa, due to some friction with the settlers. On the return voyage Camões' ship was wrecked near the Mekong River (off the coast of Vietnam) and he escaped with only his manuscript of the *Lusiads*, an incident referred to in *Lus.* 10.128. In 1567 he decided to return to Portugal and, lacking funds, was offered a passage from Goa as far as Mozambique. He was stranded there for two and a half years. The historian Diogo de Couto, who arrived in Mozambique in late 1569, clubbed together with friends to raise the poet's fare. Reaching Lisbon in April 1570, after an absence of seventeen years, Camões found the

---

<sup>6</sup> Hight (1949:114,118).

city profoundly changed, with the effects of the plague of 1569 still apparent and with the people's morale sapped by soft living and poor leadership. Though disillusioned by the condition of society and by the general indifference to his return, Camões composed a stirring dedicatory prologue and epilogue to the *Lusiads*, urging the young King Sebastião to lead his people into a glorious new age of Portuguese endeavour. The *Lusiads* was passed by the censor in 1571 and published in 1572.

Camões was granted a small pension by King Sebastião in acknowledgement of his poem and of his services in India. No further recognition was forthcoming; there appears to have been no demand, either from the court or the public, to have Camões' other works published. His last years coincided with a sharp decline in Portugal's national fortunes and with the loss, albeit temporary, of Portuguese independence. In 1578 Sebastião led a massive expedition to North Africa against the Moors; Sebastião was killed, as were eight thousand troops, and fifteen thousand survivors were sold into slavery. Camões died on 10 June 1580, shortly before the death of Sebastião's successor, the aged Cardinal King Henrique, and the accession of Philip II of Spain to the throne of Portugal.

Camões drew on his vast range of experience - as scholar, courtier, lover, soldier, gaolbird, mariner, remittance man, civil servant and pauper - to produce an extraordinarily varied body of poetry "wrestling his hardships into forms of beauty".<sup>7</sup> His work reveals a great deal about his art and about the man himself, his affections, aspirations and disappointments. The *Lusiads* is a monument to his Renaissance education and outlook, to his patriotic impulse as a Portuguese and to his personal beliefs and poetic vision. A summary of the poem's contents will identify some of the several influences which are fused together in the creation of an organic whole.

## Canto 1

After the announcement of his theme, the poet invokes the aid of the Tágides, the nymphs of the river Tagus on which Lisbon is situated and whom he substitutes for the muses of classical pagan poetry. Following a dedication to King Sebastião, the narrative opens with Vasco da Gama already sailing up the east coast of Africa, after rounding the Cape of Good Hope. The gods on Mount Olympus discuss the situation, with Venus supporting the Portuguese and Bacchus opposing their advance towards the East. When da Gama's party lands in Mozambique, Bacchus incites the Moslem inhabitants to treachery, from which the Portuguese have a narrow escape. They anchor outside Mombasa.

## Canto 2

Venus protects the Portuguese from dangers planned by Bacchus. She intercedes with Jupiter on their behalf and receives reassuring prophecies of the future conquests of

---

<sup>7</sup> An adaptation of a line of Roy Campbell's poem *Luís de Camões*. Lines 9-14 run:

Through fire and shipwreck, pestilence and loss,  
Led by the *ignis fatuus* of duty  
To a dog's death - yet of his sorrows king -  
He shouldered high his voluntary Cross,  
Wrestled his hardships into forms of beauty,  
And taught his gorgon destinies to sing.

the Portuguese in India and further east. Jupiter sends Mercury to Malindi to ensure a friendly reception for the Portuguese. On arrival at Malindi they are welcomed by the King, who asks about their country, ancestors and details of their voyage thus far.

### Canto 3

Da Gama describes the location and geography of Portugal and narrates episodes of early Portuguese history, concentrating on the realisation of Portugal's political independence and the rise of the monarchy under King Afonso Henriques (1128-1185). Prominence is given to successive campaigns to recover Portuguese territory from the Moors, who had occupied it for four centuries. The battle of Ourique (1139), decisive in this regard, is described. The flash-backs to mediaeval history include the account of the tragedy of Inês de Castro.<sup>8</sup>

### Canto 4

Da Gama continues his historical narrative and recounts the establishment of the house of Avis (under King João I) as the ruling dynasty and João's victory over Spain at Aljubarrota (1385), which secured Portuguese independence. In response to a dream of the rivers Ganges and Indus, King Manuel I (1495-1521) commissions da Gama to seek a sea route to India via the Cape of Good Hope. As the expedition prepares to set sail, an old man utters warnings against misguided ambition.

### Canto 5

Da Gama describes his own voyage as far as Malindi, including the impressive episode with Adamastor, a giant who has been transformed into the Cape of Good Hope. The retrospective narrative of da Gama comes to an end. Camões reflects on the power of poetry to immortalise those who perform heroic deeds.

### Canto 6

The mariners are entertained lavishly by the King of Malindi, who provides them with a pilot to guide them to their destination over the Indian Ocean. Bacchus descends to Neptune's underwater palace to arrange for a storm to be unleashed. In the meantime, Fernão Veloso regales his companions with the chivalrous tale of the Twelve of England. The storm planned by Bacchus materialises but the fleet is saved by the intervention of Venus. India is sighted at last. Camões reflects on true heroism.

---

<sup>8</sup> Inês de Castro was the commoner mistress of Pedro, son of Afonso IV (1325-1357). Pedro was so enamoured of her that he refused to marry a royal bride, so his father ordered her to be killed. When Pedro became King he had her corpse disinterred and crowned.

## Canto 7

Camões inveighs against the religious divisions<sup>9</sup> which deflect European Christians from waging war on Moslems. India and her peoples are described. The Portuguese meet a friendly Spanish-speaking Moor named Monsaide, who had settled in Calicut. Monsaide describes the history, past rulers and customs of the region and acts as interpreter during their stay. The Portuguese are invited to disembark by the Samorin, ruler of Calicut, and da Gama is escorted to the Samorin's palace by the Catual, a high official. Scenes of Indian history, sculpted on the gateways of the palace, are described. Da Gama learns from the Catual that local seers have prophesied their arrival. Da Gama proposes a treaty of friendship. The Catual visits the Portuguese ships and asks for an explanation of scenes painted on silk banners hanging from the flagship. Camões breaks off his narrative to renew his appeal to the Tágides. He recalls the hazards and disappointments of his life and condemns the abuse of power by corrupt officials.

## Canto 8

For the benefit of the Catual, Paulo da Gama (brother of Vasco) explains the scenes painted on the banners. These depict the exploits of Portuguese heroes such as Lusus, Viriatus, Sertorius, Prince Henry of Burgundy (father of Portugal's first King), Nuno Alvares and Prince Henry the Navigator. Incited by Bacchus, the Moslems plot to destroy the Portuguese fleet. Camões condemns avarice.

## Canto 9

With the help of the faithful Monsaide, da Gama and his party escape from Calicut and set sail for Lisbon. Venus prepares a wonderful Island of Love to await the mariners on their return voyage. She arranges for it to be inhabited by nymphs, whom her son Cupid predisposes to fall passionately in love with the Portuguese sailors. The idyllic island and the nubile nymphs are evocatively and sensually described. The ships arrive, guided by Venus herself, and many an amorous scene ensues. The nymph Tethys is the personal prize of Vasco da Gama. Camões explains that the lovely nymphs are symbols of the honours awaiting those who perform valorous deeds and urges his readers to emulate such achievements.

## Canto 10

The nymphs and the mariners are entertained to a luxurious banquet. An unnamed nymph foretells the exploits of da Gama's successors in the half century following on his discovery of the sea route to India. Tethys leads da Gama to a mountain top where she reveals and explains the structure of the universe to him. She points out those regions (such as Africa and India) which have already been made known to the Portuguese and the territories in the East (e.g. China, Timor, Java and Japan) and in

---

<sup>9</sup> The Reformation had already separated England and many German states from the Roman Catholic community of European nations.

South America that the Portuguese have yet to discover; da Gama receives the prophetic assurance that the discovery of Brazil is imminent.<sup>10</sup> Finally the mariners reach Lisbon. Camões ends his poem with an eloquent appeal to King Sebastião.

From this summary, it will be clear to any reader with knowledge of the *Aeneid* how heavily Camões depended on Virgil's poem for the structure and devices used in the *Lusiads*. The central hero of the *Aeneid* is Aeneas, whose travels bring him from the "old" world of fallen Troy to the "new" world of Italy, where his descendants are to found Rome; the central figure (though not, as we have seen, the sole hero) of the *Lusiads* is Vasco da Gama, whose journey to India will launch the Portuguese on even greater voyages of discovery. Both Bowra (1945) and Tate (1986) have shown how indispensable a knowledge of the *Aeneid* is to the understanding of the *Lusiads*<sup>11</sup> and to an appreciation of how confidently Camões controlled the shape and design of his poem. Camões' epic should not, however, be regarded as a mere copy of selected features of the *Aeneid* but as a bold and imaginative recreation of its spirit. The result is strikingly original.<sup>12</sup> Camões practises the art of creative imitation,<sup>13</sup> by which a poet constructs his own new work on the foundation of an earlier acknowledged masterpiece, adapting the material so as to enrich his own work with deliberate reminiscences of his literary predecessor which would be recognised and appreciated by the educated reader.

Camões' three opening stanzas echo the structure of *Aen.* 1.1-7, setting out the theme of the poem, introducing the hero(es) and indicating the scope and purpose of their travels:

As armas e os barões assinalados,  
Que da ocidental praia lusitana,  
Por mares nunca dantes navegados,  
Passaram ainda além da Taprobana,

---

<sup>10</sup> Brazil was discovered by Cabral in 1500, two years after da Gama's return to Portugal.

<sup>11</sup> While the basic form of the *Lusiads* and the elaboration of many of its episodes are Virgilian, the presence of other influences, less pervasive perhaps, but still important, on the poem's superstructure should be noted. Next to Virgil, Ovid provides the most influential classical model, particularly in the *Metamorphoses*. Camões was influenced also by the Italian romantic epic of mediaeval chivalry, the *Orlando Furioso* of Ludovico Ariosto (1474-1533), which contains fantastic supernatural elements and chivalrous episodes. The tone of *Orlando Furioso* probably contributed to the tale of the Twelve of England in Canto 6 and to the luxuriance of the description of the Island of Love in Canto 9. This blend of the mediaeval and Graeco-Roman, subordinated to a new theme, is typical of other Renaissance epics such as Spenser's *Faerie Queen* and Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata*.

<sup>12</sup> Bowra (1945:89) remarks, "Indeed at times he uses his model so freely that he seems to criticize it and to think that he can better it. The result is that we compare *Os Lusitadas* not as an imitation with an original but as one poem with another of the same kind".

<sup>13</sup> See the discussion of "creative imitation" in Highet (1949: 156-158). Virgil himself used this process in adapting features from the framework and contents of Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* for his composition of the *Aeneid*.

Em perigos e guerras esforçados  
Mais do que prometia a força humana,  
E entre gente remota edificaram  
Novo Reino, que tanto sublimaram;

E também as memórias gloriosas  
Daqueles reis que foram dilatando  
A Fé, o Império, e as terras viciosas  
De África e de Ásia andaram devastando;  
E aqueles que por obras valerosas  
Se vão da lei da Morte libertando  
- Cantando espalharei por toda parte,  
Se a tanto me ajudar o engenho e arte.

Cessem do sábio grego e do troiano  
As navegações grandes que fizeram;  
Cale-se de Alexandre e de Trajano  
A fama das vitórias que tiveram;  
Que eu canto o peito ilustre lusitano,  
A quem Neptuno e Marte obedeceram.  
Cesse tudo o que a Musa antiga canta,  
Que outro valor mais alto se alevanta.

*Lus. 1.3*

"The arms and the heroes of distinction,  
Who, from the western Lusitanian shore,  
Over seas never before navigated,  
Passed even beyond Ceylon,  
Extended in dangers and wars  
Beyond the limits of human strength,  
And among remote people, built  
A New Kingdom, which they raised to great heights;

And also the glorious memory,  
Of those Kings who kept on spreading  
Faith and Empire, and continued to devastate  
The heathen lands of Africa and of Asia;  
And those who by valorous deeds  
Are freeing themselves from the law of Death<sup>14</sup>  
- Singing I shall make [these] known everywhere,  
If only talent and eloquence come to my aid.

---

<sup>14</sup> I.e. they will be remembered after death.

Let there be an end to the great journeyings of the shrewd  
 Greek<sup>15</sup>  
 And of the Trojan,<sup>16</sup> [the journeyings] that they did,  
 Let the fame of the victories of Alexander  
 And of Trajan, [the victories] that they gained, fall silent;  
 For I sing the illustrious Lusitanian heart,  
 To which Neptune and Mars submitted.  
 Let there be an end to all that the Muse of antiquity sings,  
 Since another, loftier valour arises."<sup>17</sup>

Compare these stanzas with

Arma virumque cano, Troiae qui primus ab oris  
 Italiam fato profugus Laviniaque venit  
 Litora, multum ille et terris iactatus et alto  
 Vi superum, saevae memorem Iunonis ob iram,  
 Multa quoque et bello passus, dum conderet urbem  
 Inferretque deos Latio; genus unde Latinum  
 Albanique patres atque altae moenia Romae.

*Aen.* 1.1-7

"I sing of arms and the hero, who first from the shores of Troy  
 Came, exiled by fate, to Italy and to Lavinium's  
 Shores, much harassed both on land and sea  
 Through the power of the gods above, because of cruel Juno's  
 mindful anger,  
 Suffering much also in war, until he could establish his city  
 And bring his gods to Latium; whence [arose] the Latin race,  
 The Alban fathers and the walls of lofty Rome."

Camões' opening words "*As armas e os barões*" recall Virgil's "*arma virumque*" but with a striking difference, well expressed in the Latin translation of de Oliveira (1983), "*arma virosque*". Camões' epic does not centre on a single hero, as Virgil's focused on Aeneas, but on all the Portuguese heroes who, through intrepid navigation and courage in warfare, extended the boundaries of Christianity and Portuguese dominion. His celebration encompasses a wide range of Portuguese endeavour, as indicated in his selection of three categories of hero:

the heroes whose voyages of discovery and military prowess established a new kingdom;

---

<sup>15</sup> Odysseus/Ulysses.

<sup>16</sup> Aeneas.

<sup>17</sup> All translations, whether from Portuguese or Latin, are my own. In translating from the *Lusiads*, I have kept closely to the original Portuguese for the benefit of readers with a knowledge of Latin, since, as Camões himself states (*Lus.* 1.33, 7-8), Portuguese is Latin *com pouca corrupção* / "but slightly corrupted". A selection of nine different translations into English verse of *Lus.* 1.1-2 will be found in Burton 1881:128-135.

the **kings** who directed these efforts;

the **courageous individuals** whose valour contributed to the continued success of the achievements of the first two groups.

The third stanza shows that Camões' subject matter offers a challenge to the past, since he is to sing of a new type of heroism which will surpass even the feats of heroes of Graeco-Roman mythology and history.

As in the *Aeneid* (cf. *Aen.* 1.34ff.), the narrative proper of the *Lusiads* begins *in medias res* with da Gama already on the high seas (*Lus.* 1.19ff.). What has happened previously is dealt with by retrospective narration in the mouth of the "hero". Canto 5 contains da Gama's account to the King of Malindi of his voyage so far (cf. *Aen.* 2 and 3, where Aeneas recounts his past experiences to Dido, Queen of Carthage). Camões extends this device of classical epic (which originates in *Odyssey* 9-12, where Odysseus relates his adventures to King Alcinous) by making da Gama recount (in Cantos 3 and 4) earlier episodes of Portuguese history, by way of introducing his host to the character and achievements of the Portuguese. This patriotic recollection of past history recurs in the adaptation of another device used by Virgil, that of the *ecphrasis*, or description of a work of art. In *Aen.* 8.626-729,<sup>18</sup> Aeneas is shown scenes of his people's future embossed on a shield; in *Lus.* 8.1-42, Paulo da Gama interprets for the Catual of Calicut scenes depicting earlier Portuguese heroes painted on banners.

Dreams and prophetic revelations in the *Aeneid* provide models for similar episodes in the *Lusiads*. In *Aen.* 8.31-65 Aeneas receives a reassuring dream of the river Tiber, who foretells his eventual occupation of the area. This is the literary precedent for King Manuel I's dream in *Lus.* 4.67-75 of the rivers Indus and Ganges, in which the Ganges prophesies the conquest of Indian territory by the Portuguese. The scene in the underworld in *Aen.* 6 where Anchises, Aeneas' father, reveals his descendants and their achievements to him is the basis for two episodes in Canto 10. In *Lus.* 10.5-7, 10-73, a nymph entertains the feasting mariners with a list of da Gama's successors in India and their contributions to Portuguese greatness. The prophetic theme is taken up by Tethys' revelation (*Lus.* 10.91-141) to da Gama of territories destined to be conquered by the Portuguese. As a prelude to her disclosures, Tethys offers da Gama a description and explanation of the universe which matches the philosophical tone of Anchises' account to Aeneas of the purification and rebirth of souls (*Aen.* 6.724-751).

Features of the early part of *Aen.* 7, in which the inhabitants and customs of Italy are introduced, are adapted by Camões in his description of da Gama's arrival in India. In *Lus.* 7.46-54, as da Gama is escorted into Calicut by the Catual and Monsaide, he passes the Samorin's palace, on the gateways of which are sculpted scenes of past Indian history. This is inspired by the account of Latinus' palace in *Aen.* 7.170-191, in which, through the description of sculptures of Latinus' ancestors, the reader is offered "an imaginative tableau of time-honoured Roman institutions".<sup>19</sup> In *Lus.* 7.55-56 we learn that local seers have foretold the arrival and dominion of the Portuguese, which functions as a counterpart of the portents preparing the Latins for the coming of Aeneas and his men (*Aen.* 7.58-101).

---

<sup>18</sup> Modelled, of course, on the description of Achilles' shield in *Hom. Il.* 18.

<sup>19</sup> Williams (1973: 179, n. on *Aen.* 7.170 f).

Although the *Lusiads* is a Christian poem, the pagan Graeco-Roman gods play a fundamental part in it. From Virgil (ultimately, of course, from Homer), Camões adopts the device of "the council of the gods". In *Lus.* 1.20-41, as they observe the progress of da Gama's fleet over the ocean, the Olympian gods debate its fortunes. Jupiter, who had favoured Aeneas because the latter's goal was underwritten by destiny (cf. *Aen.* 1.257-258, 662), supports the Portuguese, since heaven intends that their achievements will outshine those of the "*assírios, persas, gregos e romanos*/Assyrians, Persians, Greeks and Romans" (*Lus.* 1.24.8). In both poems Jupiter uses Mercury's services to assist the voyagers: in *Aen.* 1.296-304, he despatches Mercury to Carthage to assure the Trojans of a friendly welcome, imitated in *Lus.* 2.56-58, where Mercury is sent on ahead to Malindi to prepare a hospitable reception. In *Aen.* 4.222-278, Mercury is once more sent to Carthage to remind Aeneas of his mission, later appearing in a dream (*Aen.* 4.556-570) to warn him to escape from a potentially dangerous situation. In *Lus.* 2.59-63 Mercury appears in a dream to da Gama, urging him to depart at once to avoid Mombasan treachery.

Throughout the *Aeneid* Aeneas is dogged by the divine malevolence of Juno, which is prompted by her hatred of all things Trojan and particularly by her indignation at the destined overthrow of Carthage, a favourite cult centre of hers, by the Romans, who are descended from Trojans. Her ill-will is paralleled in the *Lusiads* by the hostility of Bacchus, who resents the fact that the feats of the Portuguese in the East will eclipse his own achievements.<sup>20</sup>

O Padre Baco ali não consentia  
 No que Júpiter disse, conhecendo  
 Que esquecerão seus feitos no Oriente,  
 Se lá passar a lusitana gente.

*Lus.* 1.30.5-8

"Father Bacchus did not agree  
 With what Jupiter said, knowing  
 That they would forget his own deeds in the East  
 If the Lusitanian people were to pass there."

As Camões' counterpart of Virgil's Juno, Bacchus never ceases to harass the Portuguese. In Canto 1, after uttering a speech of bitter resentment at the safe Portuguese advance thus far, modelled on Juno's acrimonious soliloquy of *Aen.* 7.293-322 (itself a development of *Aen.* 1.37-49), he intervenes to form a treacherous, though unsuccessful, plan to destroy them. In *Lus.* 6.6-37, 70-91, as the voyagers proceed from East Africa towards India, Bacchus, indignant at Heaven's determination

De fazer de Lisboa nova Roma

*Lus.* 6.7.2

"To make of Lisbon a new Rome"

holds a submarine council of the gods in Neptune's palace. He organises a storm, this episode echoing Juno's appeal to Aeolus in *Aen.* 1 to sink the Trojan fleet.

<sup>20</sup> The belief of antiquity that Bacchus' cult originated in the East is well documented, e.g. Eur. *Bacch.* 13-17, 64, etc., Virg. *Aen.* 6.805-4, Hor. *Odes* 3.3.

Camões' Venus, on the other hand, like her Virgilian namesake, protects the voyagers, being

Afeiçoada à gente lusitana  
Por quantas qualidades via nela  
Da antiga, tão amada, sua romana:

*Lus.* 1.33.2-4

"Loving towards the Lusitanian people  
For all the qualities she saw in them  
Of her own beloved Roman people of old:"

Regarding the Portuguese as successors to the Romans in courage and language, she guides them, pleads their cause and rescues them, as the need arises. In *Lus.* 2.33-41 she complains to Jupiter about Bacchus' treacherous designs, a scene modelled on *Aen.* 1.223-253, where Venus bewails the treatment meted out to the Trojans by Juno. In both epics, Jupiter calms Venus and foretells the triumphs of her protégés. In *Lus.* 6.85-91 Venus' personal intervention pacifies the stormwinds aroused by Bacchus, in an episode modelled on the intervention of Neptune in *Aen.* 1.124-156 to save the Trojans from the storm caused by Juno. Venus' stratagem is adapted from the methods used by Juno to persuade Aeolus to loose the winds. Juno had ensured Aeolus' co-operation by offering him a beautiful nymph; in the *Lusiads*, Venus sends her nymphs to seduce the winds. In *Lus.* 9. 22-50, Venus predisposes the nymphs on her Island of Love to fall in love with the mariners through the agency of Cupid, who is also used in *Aen.* 1.657-688 to fire Dido with love for Aeneas. Venus herself makes sure that the voyagers catch sight of the Island of Love (*Lus.* 9.52) where da Gama is to hear prophecies from Tethys of his successors' achievements; in *Aen.* 6.190-211 Aeneas is guided by doves sent by Venus to the golden bough, his passport to the underworld where he will receive revelations of his descendants' exploits.

This inclusion of pagan gods in a Christian poem is but a literary device, as Camões makes Tethys herself explain:<sup>21</sup>

... eu, Saturno e Jano,  
Júpiter, Juno, fomos fabulosos,  
Fingidos de mortal e cego engano.  
Só pera fazer versos deleitosos  
Servimos;

*Lus.* 10.82.2-6

"I, Saturn and Janus,  
Jupiter, Juno were fictitious,  
Faked by mortal, blind deception.  
Only to render verses charming  
Do we serve;"

---

<sup>21</sup> It has been suggested that Camões found himself pressured by the Inquisition to explain their presence.

Earlier in his poem (*Lus.* 2.10-11), Camões is careful to show the contrast between the false god Bacchus and the true Christian God.<sup>22</sup> Yet it is remarkable that when da Gama prays to God for deliverance from the storm stirred up by Bacchus (*Lus.* 6.81), it is Venus who saves the fleet. Camões seems comfortable with the coexistence of the Christian God with the pagan pantheon, although "most critics have shown considerable unease at the combination and have never been quite able to grasp the total poetic vision".<sup>23</sup> A Neoplatonist interpretation may be placed on Camões' treatment of the Olympian gods, with Jupiter representing Divine Providence, Venus, Divine Love and Bacchus, the Spirit of Discord. As Bowra (1945:109-120) shows, as a literary device, Camões' pagan divinities enhance his poem immeasurably.<sup>24</sup>

Apart from the many episodes based on Virgilian models, Camões frequently enriches his narrative with passages and phrases reminiscent of parts of the *Aeneid*. For example, Canto 3 contains the stirring account of the cruel death of Inês de Castro. Her arrest is described in pathetic terms:

Pera o céu cristalino alevantando  
 Com lágrimas os olhos piedosos  
 (Os olhos, porque as mãos lhe estava atando  
 Um dos duros ministros rigorosos)

*Lus.* 3.125.1-4

"To the crystalline heaven raising  
 Tearfully her piteous eyes  
 (Her eyes, for one of the severe,  
 Harsh officials was tying her hands)"

These lines are inspired by Virgil's account of Cassandra's arrest on Troy's last night:

ad caelum tendens ardentia lumina frustra,  
 lumina, nam teneras arcebant vincula palmas

*Aen.* 2.405-6

"To heaven directing her burning eyes in vain,  
 Her eyes, for bonds restrained her tender palms"

<sup>22</sup> The human adversaries of the Portuguese are the Moslems, who are shown in the most unfavourable light. The only "good" Moslem is Monsaide, who by *Lus.* 9.15 wishes to become a Christian. The bias against Islam expressed in the poem should be seen in the context of the dangers perceived by the Europeans of the period to come from Moslems. While Portugal had driven the Moors out of their territory by the end of the twelfth century, Spain had managed this only by 1492 and the efforts of generations of Crusades had failed to dislodge Moslems from the Holy Land. The threat to central Europe of Moslem invasion was ever-present in Camões' day, and the defeat of the Turks by the Austrians at Lepanto (1571) occurred only after Camões' poem had been completed.

<sup>23</sup> Tate (1986:84). Giamatti (1966:212), who disapproves of the combination, states that "the result is often silly".

<sup>24</sup> Bowra (1945:109-120).

Camões has imitated both the content and the use of *epanalepsis* (repetition<sup>25</sup>). The recollection of the lines from the *Aeneid* adds further pathos to the description of a helpless victim.

Aeneas' despairing utterance when caught in the storm of *Aen.* 1 provides Camões with a further model:

o terque quaterque beati,  
quis ante ora patrum Troiae sub moenibus altis  
contigit oppetere!

*Aen.* 1.94-96

"O three and four times happy  
Those whose good fortune it was to meet death  
In the sight of your fathers beneath the lofty walls of Troy!"

Camões adapts these lines for da Gama in similar circumstances:

Oh, ditosos aqueles que puderam  
Entre as agudas lanças africanas  
Morrer, enquanto fortes sustiveram  
A santa Fé nas terras mauritanas!

*Lus.* 6.83.1-4

"Oh, happy those who were able  
Among sharp African lances  
To die, while bravely they upheld  
The holy Faith in Mauretanian lands!"

For the reader with a knowledge of the *Aeneid*, the appreciation of those lines is deepened by the reminiscence of the Trojan leader's envy of compatriots lucky enough to die in the heroic defence of a great cause and not, as he fears will shortly happen, futilely and ignobly in a shipwreck.

Camões makes frequent use of the simile of the extended type that originated in Homeric epic and which came to be regarded as an indispensable device by subsequent epic poets, Virgil included.<sup>26</sup> These similes, so distinctive a feature of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* that they have earned the epithet "Homeric", expand the comparison beyond the single point of likeness, to a fully-developed word-picture. Camões illustrates many significant moments in his narrative with similes executed in the Homeric manner and drawing on traditional subject matter (e.g. animal behaviour, winds, trees, non-heroic human activities). He understands the technique of the extended simile so well that he can create his own original examples, e.g. the comparison of a waterspout with a bloodsucking leech (*Lus.* 5.21). Several, however, are adapted directly from Virgil, e.g. *Lus.* 1.35 (winds) from *Aen.* 10.97-99, *Lus.* 2.23 (ants) from *Aen.* 4.402-407.

---

<sup>25</sup> See n. on *Aen.* 2.406 in Austin (1964).

<sup>26</sup> See Mueller (1984:108-125) on the "Homeric" simile. Garson (1976) discusses some of the Virgilian similes in the *Lusiads*.

At the beginning of *Aen.* 8, Aeneas, newly arrived in Italy, finds himself confronted by overwhelming hostile forces. The description of his mental efforts to seek a solution leads into a striking simile:<sup>27</sup>

sicut aquae tremulum labris ubi lumen aënis  
sole repercussum aut radiantis imagine lunae  
omnia pervolitat late loca, iamque sub auras  
erigitur summiue ferit laquearia tecti

*Aen.* 8.22-25

"Just as the flickering light from water in a bronze basin  
thrown off by the sun or the shining moon,  
when it glances around everywhere, and now rises  
skywards and strikes the panels of the high ceiling"

In Canto 8 da Gama is faced with prospects of treachery from his hosts in Calicut. Camões conveys the rapidity and exhaustive thoroughness of da Gama's thought processes by adapting Virgil's simile:

Qual o reflexo lume do pulido  
Espelho de aço, ou de cristal feroso,  
Que, do raio solar sendo ferido,  
Vai ferir noutra parte luminoso,  
E, sendo da ouciosa mão movido,  
Pela casa, do moço curioso,  
Anda pelas paredes e telhado,  
Trémulo, aqui e ali, e dessorsegado

*Lus.* 8.87

"Just as the reflected light from a polished  
Mirror of steel, or of lovely crystal  
That, being struck by the sun's ray  
Goes to strike another part with its light,  
And, being moved by the idle hand,  
In the house, of a curious boy,  
Passes over the walls and ceiling,  
Flickering, here and there, and agitated"

This simile made such a favourable impression on Camões that two stanzas further on, in *Lus.* 8.89, he commends foresight, anticipation, bluff and vigilance, qualities suggested to him by the simile, to an aspirant military leader.

The dramatic episode of Adamastor (*Lus.* 5.37-60) exercises a universal fascination but has particular appeal for Capetonians. The description of the giant (who has been transformed into the Cape of Good Hope) and the function of this whole section within the structure of the epic reflect features of a number of classical models, but,

---

<sup>27</sup> Adapted by Virgil from Ap. Rhod. *Arg.* 3.756-759.

paradoxically, the Adamastor episode is one of Camões' most original creations. As the fleet rounds the Cape of Good Hope, a looming figure materialises in the darkened sky:

... ãa figura  
Se nos mostra no ar, robusta e válida,  
De disforme e grandíssima estatura,  
O rosto carregado, a barba esquálida,  
Os olhos encovados, e a postura  
Medonha e má, e a cor terrena e pálida,  
Cheios de terra e crespos os cabelos,  
A boca negra, os dentes amarelos.

*Lus.* 5.39

"... a shape  
Revealed itself to us in the air, robust and strong,  
Of monstrous and enormous height,  
Its countenance stern, its beard filthy,  
Its eyes sunken, and its posture  
Frightening and evil, and its colour earthy and pale,  
Its hair full of earth and shaggy,  
Its mouth black, its teeth yellow."

The monster foretells the many shipwrecks off the Cape that will be suffered by Portuguese fleets as a reprisal for having presumed to penetrate the secrets of its waters. It specifies the deaths of Bartolomeu Dias, discoverer of the Cape, who drowned off it in 1500 when his ship foundered, Francisco de Almeida, the first viceroy of India who was shipwrecked in 1510, and Manuel de Sousa de Sepúlveda, his wife and family, who survived shipwreck in 1552 only to be tortured then killed by local natives.

The apparition identifies itself as the Cape of Storms<sup>28</sup> (later it becomes clear that it represents the spirit of the Cape) and introduces itself as Adamastor (= "Invincible"), one of the giants which took part in the mythical war against Jupiter.<sup>29</sup> He recounts how, after falling in love with the sea-nymph Thetis and being duped and rebuffed by

---

<sup>28</sup> Bartolomeu Dias named it the Cape of Storms (Cabo das Tormentas); it was renamed the Cape of Good Hope (Cabo da Boa Esperança) by King João II on Dias' return, as a presage of the hoped-for discovery of India by this route. Significantly, Adamastor introduces himself by the former name.

<sup>29</sup> Adamastor is not one of the names given to these giants (e.g. Enceladus, Briareus, Aegaeon) in classical antiquity. The name Damastor occurs in the *Gigantomachia* (*Carm. min.* 53) of the late Latin poet Claudian (d. 404 A.D.) at l.101, *saevusque Damastor* (text of T. Birt, Berlin, 1892). Some MSS of the *epithalamium* (15.20) of Sidonius, who wrote in the fifth century A.D., give the form Damastor (*Rhodopenque Damastor*, as printed in P. Mohr's Teubner text of 1895) but others have *Adamastor*, as favoured in C. Luetjohann's edition of 1887.

her, he had wandered far away to bewail his grief. The gods punished him for his rebellion by transforming him into the mountainous promontory which makes up the Cape peninsular.<sup>30</sup>

Converte-se me a carne em terra dura,  
Em penedos os ossos se fizeram;  
Estes membros que vês e esta figura  
Por estas longas águas se estenderam;  
Enfim, minha grandíssima estatura  
Neste remoto cabo converteram  
Os Deuses;

*Lus.* 5.59.1-7

"My flesh changed into hard earth,  
My bones became crags;  
These limbs that you see and this form  
Were spread out over these wide waters;  
Finally, the gods changed  
My enormous bulk into this  
Remote Cape;"

Adamastor vanishes, leaving da Gama praying that God will avert the disasters he foretold.

Much of the literary inspiration for this episode is derived from Ovid *Met.* 4.457-662, where the giant Atlas is transformed into the Atlas range of mountains. The influence of Lucan is also present, from the account of the vision of the Rubicon appearing to Caesar in *Bell. civ.* 1. 185-194. Both apparitions of geographical phenomena underline the significance of the point reached by each mortal in his journey: Caesar is warned of the consequences of crossing the Rubicon armed, while Adamastor recognises that the rounding of the Cape will bring da Gama to India and so join the Orient to Europe. Links may be seen also with the *Aeneid* in the prophetic function of the episode, the theme of metamorphosis and the structural device of the hero's encounter on his travels with an ogre. In *Aen.* 2.270-296, Aeneas has a prophetic vision of the dead Hector, who orders him to abandon Troy and seek a new home over the seas. Hector is still identifiable but is sadly changed in appearance. After his corpse was dragged behind Achilles' chariot he now has

squalentem barbam et concretos sanguine crinis

*Aen.* 2.277

"a filthy beard and hair matted with blood"

This line must surely have inspired those features of Camões' description of the transformed giant listed in *Lus.* 5.39, lines 4 and 7, quoted earlier. Other aspects of the episode recall Aeneas' narrow escape from the Cyclops Polyphemus. In *Aen.* 3.655ff., after rescuing a Greek whose father, interestingly enough, was called Adamastus (*Aen.* 3.614), Aeneas catches sight of Polyphemus (*monstrum horrendum, informe, ingens*, / "a horrendous monster, misshapen, huge", *Aen.* 3.658), who wades

<sup>30</sup> Including Devil's Peak, Table Mountain, Signal Hill, Lion's Head, the Twelve Apostles and the whole of the rocky promontory that ends at Cape Point.

out into the sea after the departing Trojan fleet. The topic of Polyphemus' unrequited love for the sea-nymph Galatea has no place in the *Aeneid* but it was traditional (cf. Theoc. *Id.* 11, Ovid *Met.* 13.738-897) and from it Camões may well have borrowed the notion of a sea-nymph rejecting the love of a giant. Certainly, the idea of the price in suffering to be paid by the Portuguese, for their daring to venture beyond the Cape towards the site of their future glories, recalls Virgil's appreciation of the cost of bringing Rome into being:

tantae molis erat Romanam condere gentem

*Aen.* 1. 33

"so massive a task it was to found the Roman race"

More than Virgil in the *Aeneid*, Camões injects his own personality into the reflective passages which frame most of the cantos. Yet even these sections have a Virgilian precedent, to be found in those parts of the *Georgics* where Virgil comments on his contemporaries and the times (e.g. *Geo.* 1.24-43, 463-514). Sadly, the vision of Portuguese greatness which sustained Camões in his years of "exile" and spurred him to compose the *Lusiads*, was not shared by the people to whom he returned.

The *Lusiads* is "an excellent example of how classical material was borrowed and transmuted by Renaissance artistry".<sup>31</sup> It is also, in the view of one scholar, the only national poem that can bear comparison with the *Aeneid*.<sup>32</sup> Through this introduction to Camões' debt to Virgilian epic, I hope that readers of *Akroterion* will be encouraged to read the *Lusiads* for themselves and so to discover its special qualities.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Atkinson, W.C. (tr.) 1952. *Luís Vaz de Camões, The Lusiads*. Harmondsworth (Penguin Classics) Repr. 1985.
- Austin, R.G. (ed.) 1964. *P. Vergili Maronis Aeneidos Liber Secundus*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Axelson, E. 1973. *Portuguese in South-East Africa 1488-1600*. Johannesburg: Struik.
- Bowra, C.M. 1945. *From Virgil to Milton*. London: Macmillan.
- Boxer, C.R. 1969. *The Portuguese seaborne empire 1415-1825*. London: Hutchinson.
- Burton, R.F. 1881. *Camoens: His life and his Lusiads. A Commentary*. London: Bernard Quaritch.
- Cidade, H. 1961. *Luís de Camões*. Lisboa: Arcádia.
- Crum, E.Le V. 1953. Homer, Vergil and Camões, in Mylonas, G.E. and Raymond, D. (edd.) *Studies presented to David M. Robinson, Vol. II*. St. Louis, Missouri: Washington University, 647-659.

---

<sup>31</sup> Giamatti (1966:160).

<sup>32</sup> Della Corte (1987:3, 639).

- Della Corte, F., Castagnoli, F. *et al.*, (eds.) 1987. *Enciclopedia Virgiliana* (5 vols.). Roma: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana.
- De Oliveira, C. (tr.) 1983. *Ludovici Camonii Lusiadae*. Lisbon.
- Fanshaw, R. (tr.) 1655. *The Lusiads* London. Ed. Bullough, G., 1963, London and Arundel: Centaur.
- Freitas, W. 1963. *Camoens and his epic: A historic, geographic and cultural survey*. Institute of Hispanic American and Luso-Brasilian Studies: Stanford University.
- Garson, R.W. 1976. Notes on Vergilian similes in the *Lusiads* of Camões. *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 77, 471-477.
- Giamatti, A.B. 1966. *The earthly paradise and the Renaissance epic*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Hight, G. 1949. *The classical tradition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Macedo, H.M. 1983. *The purpose of praise: Past and future in the Lusiads of Luís de Camões*. London: King's College (Inaugural Lecture).
- Mueller, M. 1984. *The Iliad*. London, Boston and Sydney: Allen and Unwin (Unwin Critical Library).
- Pierce, F. (ed.) 1981. *Luís de Camões, Os Lusíadas*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ramos, V. (ed.) 1966. *Luís de Camões. Os Lusíadas*. São Paulo: Cultrix.
- Tate, B. 1986. The *Lusiads* of Camoens and the legacy of Virgil, in: Cardwell, R A and Hamilton, J (eds.), *Virgil in a cultural tradition: Essays to celebrate the Bimillennium*. Nottingham, 77-85.
- Valverde, J.F. 1981. *Camões. Comemoração do centenário de "Os Lusíadas"*. Coimbra: Livraria Almedina (tr. from 1975 Spanish original).
- Williams, R.D.(ed.) 1973. *The Aeneid of Virgil, Books 7-12*. London: Macmillan.