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**L. White, trans.: The Collected Lyric Poems of Luís de Camões**

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■ INTRODUCTION ■

But I who have criss-crossed the globe  
 being, as it were, doubly cognizant,  
 remain at heart a deluded peasant  
 whom my sufferings have not ennobled.

—From “Julga-me a gente toda por perdido”

Of all Renaissance poets, Luís de Camões was the most widely travelled. Born in Portugal, he served in his twenties as a soldier in North Africa, losing an eye in fighting with the Berbers. Between 1553 and 1567, he served in India and beyond, joining expeditions to the Red Sea, along the Malabar Coast, and to islands further east, and holding administrative posts in India and Macau. So far as the English-speaking world is concerned, the best-known product of these journeys was *The Lusíads* (1572), Camões’s epic account of Vasco da Gama’s pioneer voyage to India. Beginning with Sir Richard Fanshawe’s superb translation of 1655, there have been at least eighteen versions in English, culminating in the Oxford World’s Classics translation of 1997. But in Portugal, Camões is equally loved for his lyric poems—sonnets, songs (redondilhas), elegies, hymns (canções), odes, eclogues, and others—that have never been translated in full and are virtually unknown outside his home country.<sup>1</sup>

Approximately half of this lyric poetry, including examples of all the main forms, was written during his years of travel. There are elegies written in Morocco in the late 1540s. There is a hymn, written circa

<sup>1</sup> Camões’s lyric poems are in the forms of redondilhas, sonetas, canções, elegias, odes, eclogues, oitavas, and a single sestina. “Redondilhas” means, literally, “rounds.” I have called them “songs,” the closest English equivalent. “Canções” is the Portuguese translation of the Italian “canzone”; rather than call such elaborately constructed poems “songs,” I have chosen the term “hymn.” “Oitavas,” or “eights,” are, of course, poems in ottava rima, while the form of the sestina is explained in the note to that poem.

[1]

1555, at Cape Guardafui on the northern tip of Somalia at the entrance to the Gulf of Aden, and other hymns, elegies, sonnets, odes, and an eclogue written in India and further east. What makes this poetry unique is that Camões was the first great European artist to cross the equator and face the challenges to language and form in describing the unfamiliar people and places he encountered. An ode, “Aquele moço fero” (p. 196), and the song “Aquele cativa” (p. 253) are the first poems by a modern European poet about love for a non-European woman. It seems anomalous, to put it no more strongly, that such profoundly cosmopolitan work remains virtually unknown outside Portugal.

This volume collects these poems in English translation. But the question at once arises, collects from where? Apart from *The Lusíads*, Camões published only three poems in his lifetime. The first edition of the *Rimas* appeared in 1595, fifteen years after the poet’s death. It contained 58 sonnets, 75 songs, 8 eclogues, 4 elegies, 5 odes, 10 hymns, and 3 poems in ottava rima. Expanded collections followed, in 1598 and 1616, the latter including for the first time poems retrieved from India. But even this early, poems were being published under Camões’s name that are no longer believed to be his. Two editors, living two centuries apart, were crucial to this process: namely, Faria e Sousa, the many-sided Renaissance humanist, and the Visconde de Juromenha. In their respective editions of 1685 and 1860–1869, they attributed to Camões pretty well any poems they admired from the period. The fat tomes that resulted not only obscured his own genius, but made his relationship with contemporary poets virtually invisible. Diogo Bernardes, for example, published his own lyrics in 1595, only to have his better poems attributed to the master. By the time Teófilo Braga came to coordinate the tercentenary celebrations of his death, Camões was being credited with no less than 380 Sonnets, 21 hymns, 27 elegies, 11 oitavas, 13 odes, 15 eclogues, and 5 sestinas.<sup>2</sup>

Much scholarship was expended during the early twentieth century in cutting these attributions by roughly half, not least by recognizing the achievements of Camões’s fellow poets. These included such figures as Sá de Miranda and his pupil António Ferreira, Jorge

<sup>2</sup> Theophilo Braga, *Parnaso de Luíz de Camões: edição dos poemas líricos consagrada do centenário de Camões*, 3 vols. (Porto: Imprensa Internacional, 1880). Curiously and without explanation, this attempted reconstruction of Camões’s stolen *Parnassus* (p. 6) excludes all but 7 of the redondilhas.

de Montemor, Andrade de Caminha, Frei Agostinho da Cruz, and Manuel de Portugal, to whom Camões addressed a fine ode (p. 291). It is a significant historical fact that the process of paring down the Camões canon was accomplished at a time when other Portuguese heroes were being puffed beyond recognition as founding fathers of Salazar's Estado Novo. While Camões was being celebrated as the original and ultimate spokesman of the regime, Camões scholarship was quietly revealing his true dimensions as a poet committed to no politician's cause. Given it was *The Lusíads* that first created the concept of Portugal as a nation greater than its actual kings, a concept that took wing after the Restoration of 1640, any dispute about the Camões canon becomes implicitly a dispute about the national inheritance. Did Camões really write those poems (included in this selection) about his youth beside the Mondego River, the only sizeable Portuguese river in which no Spanish water flows? Or should they be attributed to Diogo Bernardes? Did he really write those ultra-orthodox Catholic sonnets (not included in the present volume)? Or were they foisted upon him by Faria e Sousa? Even today, in Portugal's liberal democracy, there is no firm agreement on exactly what Camões wrote or did not write, and among the bewildering variety of editions of the *Rimas* on sale in Lisbon bookshops, there are none whose contents are identical.

In preparing this translation, I have followed Álvaro J. da Costa Pimpão's pruned edition of 1944 (reissued 1994). I have omitted a handful of poems: namely juvenilia, poems with flawed texts, or (rarely) poems that are just a little dull.



Equally, there are few certainties in Camões's biography. An entry in the register of Lisbon's India House for 1550 reads as follows: "Luís de Camões, son of Simão Vaz de Camões and Ana de Sá, residents of Lisbon, in Mouraria, squire, aged 25 years. Accepted on the guarantee of his father, travelling by the man-of-war S. Pedro dos Burgalese." This tells us, far from conclusively, he was born in 1524–25, that his rank was that of *escudeiro*, literally "shield-bearer" or squire, belonging to the lower orders of the nobility, and that his father's name carried weight with the India House. Perhaps he was born in Mouraria, where his parents were living in 1550. Mouraria, over-looked by Castelo São Jorge on its rocky summit, was in those days the Arab district of

Lisbon. Later it was where Portuguese Africa slaves, liberated in 1761, made their home, and where in the 1840s Fado, that most distinctive sound of Portugal, was born. Artistically, it would feel right if Camões were born in Mouraria, but no proof exists.

For some reason, possibly because he was still in Africa, Camões failed to sail on the *S. Pedro dos Burgales*. A further entry in the India House register, this time for 1553, refers to one Fernando Casado, a squire resident in Lisbon, and continues: “in his place was Luís de Camões, son of Simão Vaz de Camões and Ana de Sá, squire, receiving 2,400 reis like the others.” This time, he was sailing under compulsion. In the previous year at Corpus Christi, one of Lisbon’s biggest festivals, he had brawled with Gonçalo Borges, keeper of the King’s harness, and wounded him with a sword-thrust. Initially jailed in the Tronco Prison, he was released on payment of a fine of 4,000 *reis* and an undertaking to proceed to India as a common soldier.

It was not the first time he had been so sentenced. Willingly or otherwise, he may have spent some months in Punhete, an exquisite town in the Tagus valley, now called Constância. The evidence for this is some lines from the elegy “O Sulmonense Ovídio, desterrado” (p. 80) describing a type of river-craft found there. The elegy itself was written in Morocco, where he was dispatched in 1547 to the garrison at Ceuta, originally captured by the Portuguese in 1415 as the first step in their acquisition of a sea-borne empire. Legend and all Camões’s biographers claim that both these “exiles” were consequences of the court’s disapproval of his pursuit of an heiress, Caterina de Ataíde. There are several poems referring to “Natercia,” and several more about a love condemned by differences in rank.

Camões spent up to three years in Ceuta. Then in 1553, after his spell in the Tronco prison, he sailed to India on the *São Bento*, the only ship of four to survive the outward voyage that year. He was twenty-nine years old when he arrived in Goa, and had three years of military service before him. Almost immediately, he took part in Vice-Roy Afonso de Noronha’s expedition against the Sultan of Chembe, dubbed the “Pepper King,” describing this action at the climax to his elegy “O Poeta Simónides, falando” (p. 148). Then, between February and November 1554, he sailed with the huge armada commanded by D. Fernando de Meneses to the Persian Gulf. Later, this “Ilustre e dino ramo dos Meneses” (p. 285) was flattered with a sonnet (“so the Red

Sea, from that time on / became so only with the blood of Turks”). At the time, writing his “Junto um seco, fero e estéril monte” (p. 192), he was overwhelmed with the futility of his existence in “the most tedious place in all nature,” where he “whiled away wretched days . . . toilsome, full of grief and resentment.”

By 1556, however, he was released from “having to pursue dreadful Mars” and was appointed to the post of “Trustee for the Property of the Deceased and Absent in Macau,” which the Portuguese had captured just two years earlier. It was his first ever opportunity to prosper. Long afterwards, in a personal intervention in *The Lusíads*, he complained bitterly of the injustice of his summary dismissal from this position. We cannot know for sure what went wrong, but it is hard to imagine Camões as a trustee, or indeed as a businessman of any kind. He was careless even with his manuscripts, and perhaps the charges of embezzlement arose from the haphazard nature of his bookkeeping. The same stanza of *The Lusíads* describes being shipwrecked in the mouth of the Mekong River:

Gently, compassionately, he will receive  
On his broad bosom these Cantos, snatched  
Soaking from sad, wretched shipwreck,  
Surviving treacherous shoals, and hunger  
And countless other dangers, when  
An unjust mandate is imposed on him  
Whose lyre, played with such sweet dexterity,  
Will bring him fame, but not prosperity.<sup>3</sup>

Once again he was jailed (“Em prisões baixas fui um tempo atado” [p. 224]) and, when finally he was cleared of any financial irregularities, he was jailed yet again for being unable to pay his debts.

Given that most of the meager records of Camões’s life refer to episodes when he was in desperate trouble, the absence of records for the succeeding years is probably a good sign. In a letter home, he summed up Goa as “the mother of evil villains and wicked step-mother of honest men.”<sup>4</sup> Yet this cannot be the whole story. Though

<sup>3</sup> Luís Vaz de Camões, *The Lusíads*, translated by Landeg White (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 10.128.

<sup>4</sup> Clive Willis, ed., “The Correspondence of Camões (with introduction, commentaries, translation and notes),” *Portuguese Studies* (London: Kings College, 1995), 2:59.

the Portuguese Empire was already overextended, leading Camões to draw contrasts between his own times and former glory, Goa was no colonial backwater. Among his friends, acquaintances, and rivals were some of the most distinguished men of the day. Much of his greatest poetry was written in “India and Beyond,” including the bulk of *The Lusíads* and many of his finest sonnets. It also includes the genial banter of “Se não queries padecer” (p. 260), in which five friends are invited to a dinner party, promising “roasted crumbs of nothing / with zero as a piquant sauce,” along with other teasing verse addressed to various ladies, and the deeply felt stanzas addressed to Barbara. When he left Goa in 1567, however, he was still destitute, getting only as far as Moçambique Island on the East African coast, unable to afford to travel further. In 1569, the historian Diogo do Couto (1542–1616) found him stranded there, surviving on the charity of friends. He coordinated a fund to pay the older man’s outstanding debts and for a passage to Lisbon on the *Santa Clara*. Couto makes a tantalizing reference to *O Parnaso de Luís de Camões*, a book “de muita erudição, doutrina e filosofia,” which was stolen from him and has disappeared.

Lisbon in the spring of 1570 was plague-bound, and the sixteen-year-old King Sebastião, who had succeeded to the throne two years earlier, was widely regarded as mad. Camões’s mother was still alive, perhaps still living in Mouraria, but legend has the poet living in poverty at Alcântara on the Tagus, along with one black servant. *The Lusíads* (1572) brought him a small pension from the king “for the adequacy of the book he wrote on Indian matters.” The evidence of his final poems, with their eulogy of possible patrons, is that he longed for greater recognition and suitable employment.

Six years after *The Lusíads* appeared, with its closing appeal for the imperial adventure to be rekindled, Sebastião led an army of over 20,000 of Portugal’s finest men to catastrophic defeat at Alcácer-Kebir in Morocco. The outcome was that the Portuguese throne passed to Philip II of Spain. Legend declares Camões’s last words to have been, “All will see that so dear to me was my country I was content to die not only in it but with it.” But even the date of his death is uncertain, perhaps 10 June 1580, perhaps exactly one year earlier. According to Josepe Índio, the Dominican priest who was at his bedside, he was laid to rest in a borrowed shroud. The church of Santa Ana, his final home, was destroyed in the earthquake of 1755. For the tercentenary

celebrations of 1880, what were assumed to be his remains were re-buried in the monastery of the Jerónimos at Belém.



So much for the facts. Evidently, they tell us little for sure about far the most important aspect of Camões's life, his poetry. *The Lusíads* did not take contemporaries by surprise. His friends and acquaintances were well aware of the verse circulating in manuscript, and one of his odes, "Aquele único exemplo" (p. 266), had been published in 1563 as preface to Garçia de Orta's *Colóquio dos Simples e Drogas da Índia*, a pioneer study of India's medicinal plants. But court records, together with the odd glimpse in the memoirs of his contemporaries, throw little light on the sources of Camões's poetry.

Somewhere in his youth, perhaps at Coimbra University, he acquired a profound and extensive knowledge of Latin literature. Virgil and Ovid, in particular, left lasting imprints. So broad was his knowledge that some of his classical references effectively function as riddles. How many of his readers back in the 1570s would have been able to identify "the bright lover of the adulterous Larissen" mentioned at the start of canto 10 of *The Lusíads*? The reference is to the sun god, Apollo, who had an affair with Coronis of Larissa, in the course of which she was unfaithful to him, so that Camões is describing, with appropriate wit, dawn rising over the Island of Loves.

More is involved here than university-educated men showing off. Camões lived at a time when the established classics still provided a sure guide to life. To imitate classical writers, demonstrating their continuing relevance by giving familiar passages a modern twist, was to offer contemporary readers both instruction and delight. *The Lusíads* is a Christian epic, but Virgil's *Aeneid* provided much of its framework. Ovid's *Metamorphoses* supplied a number of myths involving Arabia, the Indian Ocean, and India itself, giving Camões a "tradition" on which to build, and simultaneously allowing him to claim these places had been colonized by European imaginations long before the arrival of the "Moors," the arch-enemy of *The Lusíads*. This method has its origins in the lyric poems, though, once Camões's travels began, it was the Ovid of the *Tristia*, those poems of banishment to the barren coast of the Black Sea, that nourished the fertility of the *Elegies*.

Latin literature from another source came through the filter of his favorite renaissance poets. Camões's older contemporary Sá de Miranda spent the years 1521–26 in Italy, and wrote the first Portuguese sonnets, as well as introducing the hymn, the elegy, the tercet, the oitava, the eclogue, and the decasyllabic line, all forms Camões was to make his own. As Sá de Miranda was returning to Portugal, he spent time in Spain, where he made the acquaintance of Juan Boscán and Garcilaso de la Vega, who were themselves the first to introduce Italian verse forms to Spanish readers. Whether Camões first encountered Petrarch and the Italian pastoralist Jacopo Sanazzaro through Sá de Miranda, or through their Spanish imitators, is not clear. But his admiration for these poets is attested not just by the number of times he imitates or borrows from them, but by unqualified eulogy:

Petrarch will sing to us of that laurel  
 he burned for, Daphne's tree, and his own Laura,  
 the same who with his rare, grand style  
 halted in full flow the crystalline river:  
 Sanazzaro would play his flute awhile  
 on the mountain, in the village, or wherever,  
 and Castilian Garcilaso would serenade us,  
 repeating his praise of the proud Tagus.<sup>5</sup>

The greatest of these debts to Renaissance poets is transparently to Petrarch. What Petrarch knew as his *Rerum Vulgarium Fragmenta* (Fragments in the Vernacular) was published after his death as the *Canzoniere*, or Song Book. The majority were sonnets, and though the collection also included hymns (canzone), sestinas, ballads, and madrigals, it was the sonnets that swept Europe in a literary craze that took two centuries to exhaust itself, moving through Italy, Spain, and France, and washing up on the shores of Elizabethan England in Sidney's *Astrophel and Stella*, Spenser's *Amoretti*, and Shakespeare's *Sonnets*.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> "Quem pode ser no mundo tão quieto" (p. 141), 1.193–200.

<sup>6</sup> Petrarch's sonnets are divided into an octave, rhyming *abbaabba*, and a sestet, rhyming *cedcde*, but with variations. It was Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey (1517–1547) who modified this form, inventing what is now called the Shakespearean sonnet, rhyming *abab cdcd efef gg*.

But there was a third, important ingredient to the fashioning of Camões's mature style, namely, his deep love of Portuguese folksong. This knowledge is freely on display in the epigraphs to many of his songs, such as "To this old song," "On this common song," or "On this theme," followed by three or four lines of quotation before his own poem begins. It is a striking feature of Portuguese literary history that Camões did not have to scour the countryside collecting this material. He would have encountered the taste for folksong at court. Some of the oldest poetry produced at the Castilian and Portuguese courts between 1200 and 1350 was in imitation of Provençal troubadours. Some 1,680 cantigas have come down to the present day, written not in Castilian, the normal language of the court, but in Galician-Portuguese, the dialect of northwestern Iberia. There are cantigas d'amigo, or songs about a friend, usually a lover, and cantigas d'escarnho, or songs of scorn, directed at landowners, hypocritical priests, exorbitant prostitutes, cowardly soldiers, and rival poets, and including some five hundred examples where the singer is assumed to be a woman. Among the poets of the cantigas are Kings Sancho I and Dinis of Portugal, both hero figures in *The Lusíads*. This courtly appreciation of vernacular folksong was continued in such influential Portuguese anthologies as Garcia de Resende's *Cancioneiro Geral* (1516), which, alongside poems inspired by Dante and Petrarch, printed vilancetes and madrigals much in the manner of the older cantigas.

Camões's songs may be seen as continuing this tradition. No less than three-quarters are in the forms used in the cantigas, with lines of five to seven syllables in stanzas of seven or eight lines, rhyming *abbaacc*, with variations. Songs like "Caterina é mais Formosa," (p. 128) or "Por cousa tão pouco" (p. 190), a girl's complaint about "dumb John" in love with "a turban," would have been instantly recognizable to the troubadours. Camões did not need to turn to his Petrarch to appreciate what could be done in vernacular styles. He had models much closer at hand.

Virgil and Ovid, Petrarch and Boscán, together with Portuguese folksong: these were the principal poetic resources he took with him when he sailed to Ceuta in 1547 and to India in 1553.



In the elegy, "O Poeta Simónides, falando" (p. 148), Camões describes his voyage to India via the Cape of Good Hope. As he leaves the estuary

of the Tagus, the nymphs Galateia, Panopeia, and Melanto accompany him, scattering spray from their scallop shells, and he chats with them companionably. They had been the heroines of the eclogues of his juvenilia. But they cannot face the Atlantic. They have to turn back, promising to convey his farewells to the shepherds of the Tagus valley, and inscribe his name on the gold-bearing sands. Within three tercets, he is in a new hemisphere under constellations he does not recognize, as “the waves became vertiginous,” “the rigging whistled in the uproar,” and “the blaspheming of the shocked / mariners curdled the atmosphere.” Ovid’s *Tristia* (especially 1.10) may have been partly in his mind here, but he had never written anything remotely similar. Though he vows, in true Petrarchan fashion, to be eternally faithful to his lady, and though he concludes the elegy with lines evoking lives of pastoral simplicity, both courtly love and rural peace have to be redefined. For “love is never truly courtly / while in the presence of its cure,” while no “happy peasant” could be expected to grasp the exigencies of his new “muscular verse.” Later, in canto 5 of *The Lusíads*, this same storm was to be worked up into the epic encounter with Adamastor.

He had not previously tinkered with the epic manner, but he had faced the challenge of difference. His first two elegies, “O Sulmonense Ovídio” (p. 80) and “Aquele que de amore” (p. 86), were written in Ceuta, drawing directly for both form and content on Ovid’s *Tristia*. From the very beginning of his travels, Camões contrasts “this exiled life of pain / with the good I knew in another time.” But he was not unresponsive:

Pacing out my life of pain,  
and declaring its unremitting sadness  
to the burning sands of this African  
  
beach, I study the sea’s relentless  
motion, as with its thunderous booming  
it reverberates in the greater emptiness,  
  
and with its furious white spume  
it takes sorrowful hold  
of the earth where it disperses foaming,  
  
and earth in turn appears to yield  
her beckoning womb helplessly  
to the penetrating, saltodorous tide.

In all such matters I feel such empathy  
I scarcely know if I'm seeing what's out there  
or whether it's determining me.

If I'm tempted by such misfortune to despair  
I cannot, because love and the heart's  
affections do not accommodate self-murder.

I meditate at times on the newness  
and oddity of things, such as change,  
if only I could direct its course,

and my mind struck by this foreign  
land, these new ways of being human,  
a different people with customs I find strange,

I climb the mountain Hercules the Theban  
divided from Gibraltar's Rock,  
giving entrance to the Mediterranean,

and I try to imagine where he picked  
the apple of the Hesperides . . .

These extraordinarily rich lines contain so much of what is to follow—the lonely pacing of the beach, the interrogation of the sea, the deep curiosity about “this foreign / land, these new ways of being human,” the obscure sense he is himself changing in response to this new geography, and the recourse to classical myth to get his bearings in a new poetic language. The elegy ends with the vow that no matter how far his travels take him, even as far as the “black waters / of Cocytus,” he “will sing what is written in my heart,” celebrating “though tired and cold, the shining face / of Fancy, of whom I never lost sight.” His dedication is to his poetry, and that poetry is sustained by love that “is never forfeit in exile”:

still less is it cancelled by dying obscurely,  
for in the end the soul lives eternally  
and love is the effect of soul and endures.

Evidently, Camões did not travel for travel's sake. He left Portugal to avoid jail, and he presents his years abroad as a sustained banishment, imposed on him by an implacable destiny. He experienced the

exile's idealization of home, the nostalgia for past pleasures, the sense of time passing to little purpose, the longing for and the fear of death. He did not like being stranded at Cape Guardafui, "a place the sun blazes / on so ferociously it vanishes." The description was accurate, and he must have taken a craftsman's pleasure in evoking such an unfamiliar landscape. But only the sight of migrating birds gave him a sense of distant contact with all he valued. He rarely says anything complimentary about Goa, which a savage sonnet categorises as "source of the pus / that gathers around the world's disease" (p. 234). The hymn "Com força desusada" (p. 263), acknowledging plants on which "both cattle and one's eyes feast," may be about Goa, though Ternate and Ambon are also candidates. He praises the "palm groves" that "keep the peasant on his farm / contented for ever / with various fruits from the one trunk." But there is otherwise very little in these lyrics to prepare us for the luxuriant description of trees and flowers in canto 9 of *The Lusíads*, or the celebration of the earth's wealth and its multitude of peoples in canto 10.

There are twenty-first-century readers who will take him to task for this. Where are the commemorations of the richness and variety of African, Indian, and Chinese culture that are supposed to be the endgame of such travelling? Camões lived in a different world, and if we are to recognize his achievement we must be prepared to travel mentally. After the major European powers had seized control of three-fifths of the earth's surface, the age of the discoveries seemed in retrospect a confident assertion of Europe's imperial destiny. In the sixteenth century, however, the first impact of those voyages to the Americas and to India was a profound questioning of all that had appeared fixed and secure. As Bartolomé de Las Casas wrote, hoping to catch the ear of Charles V of Spain, "Everything that has happened . . . has been so extraordinary . . . it seems indeed to overshadow all the deeds of famous men of the past and to silence all talk of other wonders of the world."<sup>7</sup> Wonder at what had happened, in this case at the scale of the atrocities committed in Spanish America, extended to uncertainty about the very foundations of human knowledge, and is reflected across the age as one element in those vast movements we

<sup>7</sup> Bartolomé de Las Casas, *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies* (London: Penguin, 1992), 3.

encompass metaphorically as the “Renaissance,” the “Reformation,” and the “Enlightenment.”

From this perspective, pacing that beach in North Africa, Camões is a poet of questioning, reinterpreting the poetic idioms of the day in terms of those new lands and unprecedented encounters. Each poem, no matter how brief, has a point to make, in the metaphysical manner, and behind most of them one senses the pressure of lived experience. He brings to his travels a creative literal-mindedness, so that all inherited metaphor is tested against his own “truths,” a word he invariably employs in the plural. How ridiculous, for example, and yet how marvellous, that he should be searching in Morocco for the exact location where Hercules picked the apple of the Hesperides and fought with the giant Antheus! Later, in *The Lusíads*, Vasco da Gama is made to boast to the Sultan of Malindi that his pioneer voyage to India puts those of the ancients in the shade. He vents his professional scorn for Odysseus for abandoning half his crew on the island of the lotus eaters, and for Aeneas for losing even his helmsman on a calm night, and we are brought face to face with a practical navigator’s reading of the *Odyssey* and the *Aeneid*. The words are da Gama’s, of course, but Camões never distances himself from them.



Camões’s editors are fond of identifying which of his sonnets derive from which Petrarchan originals. “Tanto de meu estado” (p. 26) is patently a rewriting of Petrarch’s “Pace non trovo”. Similarly, “Lindo e sutil trançado” (p. 32), about ribbons that have fallen into the lover’s hands, is based on Petrarch’s “O bello man,” where the adored object is a glove, while Camões, too, has a sonnet “O culto divino” (p. 34) that describes falling in love during divine worship when his thoughts should have been elsewhere. What appear to be the earlier sonnets contain much that is more generally reminiscent of the *Canzonieri*: snow that burns, happiness that hurts, eyes that kill and restore to life, together with the constant play of antithesis as Love wars against Reason and both war against Destiny. Love is the principal actor, personified in a variety of roles, ranging from the grinning Cupid of “Num jardim adornado” (p. 31) to the capricious tyrant of “Bem sei, Amor” (p. 99) or “Quando, Senhora, quis Amor” (p. 103). As in Petrarch, language itself is a central theme, for while both poets insist on the absolute primacy

of personal experience, both poets recognize their dependence on verse idioms to understand love, and to reproduce the same feelings in their readers. In two early sonnets, Camões promises,

Once you experience love, I'm persuaded  
you'll know what I'm on about in my verses,

while the contrary of this delicate balancing act declares,

I'll sing of love in a manner so svelte  
with theme and style perfectly matched  
two thousand amorous parts of speech  
will make hearts feel what they never felt.<sup>8</sup>

But all this is before Africa and India. What is striking about the poetry of Camões's travels is the way the derived features of his style are transformed to serve utterly contrasting ends.

Consider the song "Aquele cativa" (p. 253), known to generations of Portuguese readers as "Stanzas to the Slave Barbara." It is a poem in the Petrarchan manner, the poet praising his mistress for being lovelier than the rose, brighter than meadow flowers or the stars in the heavens, a heartless, unattainable beauty, whom the enslaved lover can worship only from afar. Yet this Barbara is dark-skinned, with black hair and non-European features. She is his "captive," a female prisoner whom the soldier poet has made his apparently reluctant concubine. It is this situation of gross sexual exploitation, reflecting the cruel realities of early colonial conquest, to which the Petrarchan conventions are applied, providing Camões with the astonishing opening lines, "That slave I own / who holds me captive," and the equally astonishing conclusion, "This is the vassal / who makes me her slave." Having turned both poetic and social conventions upside down, he continues by subverting other modes: the assumptions that white skin, an alabaster neck, a bosom like snow, and hair like gold are the marks of the desirable mistress. So Barbara becomes "distinct in feature / eyes dark and at rest," her "hair is raven / and the fashion responds / forgetting its given / preference for blonde," and finally "Love being Negro, / at so sweet a figure / the blanketing snow / vows to change colour."

<sup>8</sup> "Enquanto quis Fortuna que tivesse" (p. 25) and "Eu cantarei do amor tão doce-mente" (p. 25).

Perhaps the poem's most disturbing line is the fourth, "who scorns I should live." This sounds like the cruel mistress of Petrarchan courtly love, despising her adorer. Or is it instead the smouldering resentment of a slave, hating her exploiter? A generation later, Shakespeare and Donne would take pleasure in upsetting the conventions ("My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun"), but it is hard to feel that anyone travelled so far as Camões in taking Petrarch apart.

It is not an easy poem to translate. The doctrine of "types," the convention that different styles were necessary for representing different social levels, has been obsolete for over two centuries. Those opening images of rose and starlight seem merely hackneyed, and we no longer feel, as Camões's first readers would have felt, that it is precisely their application to a slave girl that is startling. The effect could so easily have been mock-heroic, diminishing Barbara by the extravagance of the language applied to her. Instead, we have a poem of such tender authority that, although there is no evidence Barbara ever existed, most readers are instantly persuaded not only that she was a real person, much as described, and open to erotic fantasy, but that Camões was deeply in love with her.

Something similar happens in the mature sonnets, as the familiar Petrarchan tropes are turned inside out under the sheer pressure of "pure truth / living experience my teacher."<sup>9</sup> Several are based explicitly on the contrast between "those days when love was a fine game" and his present existence as "a galley slave."<sup>10</sup> The contrast is not just between past and present, Jerusalem and Babylon. In "Eu cantei já, e agora vou chorando" (p. 231), one of his subtlest, most poignant sonnets, he acknowledges, about the very act of writing, that "so wretched is my present condition / I was judging the past to be free of pain":

What drove me to sing so cunningly?  
Fulfilment? No! It was the future's map  
I sang, but even then to the clanking of chains.

Evidently, the love of paradox and oxymoron remains, but the old Petrarchan gap between humble lover and exalted mistress has become the actual width of the Atlantic and Indian Oceans, as "fidelity" is

<sup>9</sup> "Conversação doméstica afeiçoa," p. 226.

<sup>10</sup> "No tempo que de Amor viver soia," p. 228.

“put to the ultimate test.”<sup>11</sup> Those metaphors of pursuit and conquest and killing are suddenly serious as he fights in real wars, carrying “in the front line, in an echoing / strident voice,” his mistress’s name into battle.<sup>12</sup> Like an “adroit mariner” who has survived shipwreck and swears he will never again venture on the ocean, he swears to avoid his lady’s sight, only to be drawn back inevitably to “that fatal coast.”<sup>13</sup> He has been fettered “in vile prisons,” sacrificing his life “as a warning/ that love demands more than lambs or heifers.”<sup>14</sup> Yet Cupid all but disappears as an actor. The poet’s constancy in love established, perhaps not altogether convincingly, it is “time’s project in me” and “the implacable fates” he struggles with, as “fortune, accident, time and luck / rule over this world’s confusion.”<sup>15</sup>

In the guise of the fisherman Aónio, he paces the tropical beach longing for the loved one’s voice but hearing only the wind in the casuarinas.<sup>16</sup> Then there is the short cycle of sonnets addressed to the woman he calls Dinamene. No one has convincingly identified this lady, apparently drowned at sea—perhaps another local lover, possibly the Chinese mistress drowned, according to Diogo do Couto, when Camões was shipwrecked in the Mekong Delta on being summoned back from Macau, and who in turn was possibly Barbara. Originally, Dinamene had been one of the Tagus nymphs waving to him from her scallop shell as he set out for India, the name itself borrowed from a poem by Garcilaso de la Vega. As applied in these sonnets, it both undermines any sense of difference between Europe and the East, and emphasizes the cruel irony of his new situation: that in the real world of India and beyond, nymphs do not survive their submersion.

The main themes of these later sonnets are contradiction, no longer relished as paradox, along with stoic endurance, bereavement, and heroic death. In a manner that owes less to Petrarch than to the cantigas, he takes, as his heroes and heroines, peasants caught in the tangle of love and fate. Nise and Montano, for example, divided by

<sup>11</sup> “Quem quiser ver d’Amor ua excelência,” p. 159.

<sup>12</sup> “Senhora minha, se a Fortuna imiga,” p. 160.

<sup>13</sup> “Como quando do mar tempestuoso,” p. 161.

<sup>14</sup> “Em prisões baixas fui um tempo atado,” p. 224.

<sup>15</sup> “No mundo quis um tempo que se achasse,” p. 220; “Verdade, Amor, Razão, Merecimento,” p. 288.

<sup>16</sup> “O céu, a terra, o vento sossegado,” p. 173.

circumstance, she “tired of herself, of fate and the years,” lamenting his departure freshly each dawn while he, once again pacing “the beaches of the Indian Ocean” and perhaps echoing Dinamene, mourns her “who preferred to leave me.”<sup>17</sup> Or Daliana, betrayed by the shepherd she loved, and taking revenge by marrying cowman Gil, only to wither away in her lifelong misery.<sup>18</sup> Or a second Daliana, married to Laurénio but desiring Sílvio, a case of “nature’s discord” that pity for her husband, nor his genuine compassion for her, can resolve.<sup>19</sup>

These tales of love’s contradictions and of time and fate to be endured are continued in sonnets on biblical and classical themes: Jacob, cheated on his wedding day after working seven years to earn Rachel, and at once embarking on seven more years’ labor;<sup>20</sup> Cephalus, “under the power of misplaced passion,” begging forgiveness from the wife who betrayed him;<sup>21</sup> Telephus, wounded by Achilles, and told by the oracle the only cure was to be wounded a second time:<sup>22</sup>

such is your beauty, my prognosis  
is that of a patient swollen with dropsy:  
the more I drink in, the greater my thirst.

The sonnets celebrating heroic deaths follow naturally on such themes: Leander’s dying wish that his body should not be exposed for Hero to discover,<sup>23</sup> and Portia’s preferred method of suicide by swallowing hot coals, “for I don’t want any death without pain.”<sup>24</sup>

His oeuvre also includes sonnets, not all appearing in the present volume, of heroic death in colonial battles. These are rather less to modern taste, not least because such extravagant praise of figures so obscure they cannot always be identified rings a little false. It raises the question that hovers over the poems of Camões’s final period: to what extent he was struggling finally to conform, religiously and socially, in the hope of gaining preferment. *The Lusíads* closes with an appeal to King Sebastião to find some use for his talents, and the

<sup>17</sup> “Apartava-se Nise de Montano,” p. 166.

<sup>18</sup> “Tomava Daliana por vingança,” p. 167.

<sup>19</sup> “Quantas vezes do fuso s’esquecia,” p. 167.

<sup>20</sup> “Sete anos de pastor Jacob servia,” p. 219.

<sup>21</sup> “Sentindo-se tomada a bela esposa,” p. 164.

<sup>22</sup> “Ferido sem ter cura perecia,” p. 165.

<sup>23</sup> “Seguia aquele fogo, que o guiava,” p. 163.

<sup>24</sup> “Como fizeste, Porcia, tal ferida?,” p. 279.

frustrations of his last years may be reflected in, for example, the extravagant flattery of the Duke of Aveiro in “A Rústica Contenda” (p. 307), or the self-repudiating orthodoxy of the second part of “Sóbolos os Rios” (p. 317). As Helder Macedo, one of Camões’s most acute critics, has noted, the last line of the sonnet “Verdade, Amor, Razão, Merecimento” (p. 288), which runs “but best of all is to have faith in Christ,” though perhaps intended as “simply an orthodox profession of Christian faith,” seems “a non sequitur, an absurdity comparable to the absurdity of human existence.”<sup>25</sup>

Apart from a handful of late sonnets, along with the sensuous eclogue “Arde por Galateia” (p. 328), and the stark sestina “Foge-me pouco a pouco” (p. 330), with its unrepentant devotion to “those lovely, gentle and lucid eyes,” the greatest poem of Camões final period is the hymn “Vinde cá, meu tão certo secretário” (p. 297), which looks back on a lifetime to rehearse all his old themes—the reasons for writing; his audience of “the desperate”; his devotion to love imbibed at birth; the mistress worshipped for her flawless eyes; his exile; the “lawless fury of Mars”; the “friendly people” he first took to be hostile in a land that “seemed lethal”; his continuing ill-fortune; the irrepressible memories—until he cuts himself off with the cry that brought *The Lusíads* to an end, “No more, song, no more!” It is a poem that resonates throughout with all he has previously written, and it ends with a personal epitaph:

Nor do I sing for courtesy’s sake  
with a taste for praising, but to make  
pure truths known about my former times.  
Would to God they were mere dreams.



All translation involves compromise, literary translation most of all. In Camões’s case, the principal trade-off is between the economy and simplicity of his nouns and verbs and the prolixity of his epithets.

Unlike *The Lusíads*, Camões’s lyrics have found few English translators. Only Richard Burton has attempted what I have attempted

<sup>25</sup> Helder Macedo, “Conceptual oppositions in the poetry of Camões,” in *Post-Imperial Camões: Portuguese Literary and Cultural Studies* 9 (University of Massachusetts/Dartmouth) 66 (2003): 63–77.

here, and he suffered from two handicaps he never overcame. First, he was working with what were assumed in the late nineteenth century to be Camões's complete lyric poems. Though he never got round to doing the eclogues and elegies, he did translate 360 sonnets, 21 hymns, 14 odes, and 5 sestinas—considerably more than the present collection and more than half of it *not* by Camões. This handicap was compounded by his ambition to write as Camões would have written had he been born an Englishman in 1524: that is, pre-Shakespeare, pre-Spenser, a language he has to cobble together from such sources as Wyatt and Surrey. This, for example, is his version of the octave of one of Camões's most subtle sonnets, "Transforma-se o amador na cousa amada" (p. 93):

Becomes the Lover to the Loved transmèwed,  
 By thoughts and reveries the Fancies fire:  
 Then have I nothing left to desire,  
 For the Desir'd is in me embùed.  
 If my transmèwed soul in her be viewed,  
 What can my formal body look for higher?  
 Only in self for Rest it can desire,  
 Since that same Spirit has my form Imbrùed.

Nothing could be further from the grace and economy of the original. J. J. Aubertin, who translated 70 sonnets, just over half by Camões, in 1884, compared it to the music of Handel, and one has just that sense of fragile but robust perfection, reinforced by a steely wit.

This particular sonnet is unusual, though, in that over half the rhyming words are nouns or verbs. Far more commonly, Camões's rhymes are adjectives or adverbs, or verbs in participle form and hence functioning as adjectives. He could do this without sacrificing the natural word order because, of course, in Portuguese the adjective normally follows the noun and the adverb the verb it modifies, increasing exponentially the number of rhymes available. The translator's choice is whether to imitate Camões's rhyme scheme, with all the syntactical acrobatics that requires, or whether to try to capture in English the naturalness and lucidity of his style. Most of my predecessors, from the small selections by Strangford (1804), Hemans (1818), and Aubertin, down to Baer's *Selected Sonnets* (2005), have opted for the former. But with the question posed as I have done,

there seems only one appropriate answer. A relatively relaxed rhyme scheme, mixing full and half rhymes with sometimes the merest echo of a vowel or consonant, allows for versions that read like modern English, while actually being closer to the way rhymes sound in Portuguese because they are so easy. I have also opted to transfer back to the nouns and verbs, what the poems are about and what they are doing, something of the richness of Camões's epithets. A simple noun followed by a line of four multisyllabic adjectives does not work well in English. In pursuing an English equivalent of Camões's manner, I have cut back on the descriptive words but increased the number of synonyms. In "Aqueela cativa" (p. 253), for instance, Camões sticks throughout to the noun "cativa." It is the translation that has made her "slave," "captive," and "vassal." The reader must be the judge of how well this works.

The order in which, for the first time, the poems are presented here, loosely grouped in four sections, rests on two assumptions.<sup>26</sup> First, that poems referring to specific events were written more or less contemporaneously. Secondly, that Camões's poetic style matured delectably as he grew older. Both these assumptions may obviously be

<sup>26</sup> Portuguese scholars have been reluctant to speculate on where and when the majority of Camões's lyrics may have been written. The excesses of attribution, culminating in the 1880s, were matched by excesses of biographical speculation, with the poems (not all of them by Camões) raided for information about his life, the results being then applied to elucidate the poems. In sharp reaction, as I have described, twentieth-century Portuguese scholars worked tirelessly to establish what Camões actually wrote, eschewing biography for the more rigorous critical practices of formalism, mannerism, and (more recently) discourse theory. José Hermano Saraiva's bestselling but novelistic *Vida Ignorada de Camões* (Europa-America, 1978) seemed only to reconfirm the need to maintain this strict attendance to the actual texts.

Yet no one doubts Camões spent some two-thirds of his adult life in Africa and India, and it seems critically evasive not to recognize that his poetry shows the mark of these travels. A paper by Saraiva, presented to the Lisbon Academia das Ciências in 1982 (*Tome xxii*, 257–84), plausibly assigned forty-three of the major poems to four distinct periods. I have rejected only one of his suggestions, namely, that the eclogue "Que grande variedade vão fazendo" (p. 199) was written in 1570 after Camões's return to Portugal. Both the dedication and the letter from Goa make it clear that it belongs to the period shortly after his arrival in India. Saraiva, however, did not discuss the sonnets or songs. Subsequently, Maria de Lourdes Saraiva published a small edition of Camões's *Sonnets* (Europa-America, n.d.), dividing them into four periods more or less matching my own. Her three-volume edition of the *Lírica Completa* (Imprensa Nacional, 1986–2002) is organized by theme but makes suggestions by way of annotation about possible dates.

questioned. For a poet whose work circulated in manuscript for over thirty years, there is no knowing how stable these texts were.<sup>27</sup> The hymn “Junto de um seco, fero e estéril monte” (p. 192) may possibly have more of the 1570s than 1555 about it. But I suggest this hardly matters. Even if that poem were written late as Camões looked back on his travels, it would still reflect his thoughts about that period, and may be placed in that context. The hardest poems to place are the songs, many of which float free of any discernible background. But Camões did not spend his life as a learned doctor at the University of Coimbra, endlessly recycling existing tropes. His greatest work was produced in Africa and the East, and I have tried to underline that truth. Needless to say, the reader is not obliged to accept the arrangement proposed here in order to enjoy these superb poems. It remains astonishing that most English readers will be encountering them for the first time.

<sup>27</sup> The hymn “Manda-me Amor que cante docemente” (p. 135) exists in three versions, and there are differences between the versions of the ode “Aquele único exemplo” (p. 266) published in 1563, when Camões was alive, and in *Rimas*, 1595. Otherwise, we are largely in the dark.

