

*When Monsters (and the Portuguese)
Roamed the Earth: The Production of Alterity
in the Works of Camoens*

In the Middle Ages, India was depicted as a land of *thauma* (marvels and curiosities). As the farthest geographical zone, it formed a repository for onerotic projections, a place of dreams, inhabited by fantastic men and beasts. India was also portrayed as an earthly paradise, where one could experience bizarre carnal enjoyments and encounter proto-Christians. This ambiguous conception of India continued into the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, well after explorers had reached its shores and actual physical encounters with Indian populations had cast the existence of both the monsters and Indian Christians into doubt. Even new-found knowledge would not force Europeans to relinquish their pre-conceived notions. Explorers traveled eastward with an idea of what they would find. Since they knew their classical authors, Christian encyclopedias, natural science treatises, romances, maps, and miracle letters, it is not surprising that the lands they set out to discover would conform to the world previously configured in this literature. This India, divided into antitheses of the civilized and the barbarian and cohabited with saintly heathens, Christians, and monsters, would continue to haunt western consciousness in various forms for years to come. These various figures appear as embodiments of time, feeling, and place. They incorporate fear, desire, and anxiety. Beckoning from the edges of the world, they provide lessons in morality for secular audiences (Cohen 1996: 18).

The term “*monstrum*” both means “that which reveals” and also offers a warning (from the Latin *monere*) of what a person could become (ib. 4). In contrast, the Indian Christians (either in the form of real St. Thomas Christians or proto-Christian brahmins) provide

an ideal to be emulated. It was believed that the Indian Christian would be an ally upon whom one could rely when western Christian secular and religious powers showed themselves to be weak. Whereas the body of the Indian monster would provide a safe expression in clearly delimited and liminal space for fantasies of aggression and inversion, the Indian Christian could be seen as an intermediary other with some alterity, but often no different than the European self. The alterity of both, once assimilated into familiar space could be reduced, even cancelled, in polysemic play. Imaginary Indian Christians and monsters would provide escapist delight, giving way to fear when either group threatened to overstep its boundaries. They bear witness to the fragility of our classificatory boundaries. When successfully contained, however, they function as our alter egos. They give voice to our fragmented self, as long as we repress any displacement of the interior radical alterity that their presence consistently disavows (Uebel 1996: 282). They ask us, much as does Montaigne's cannibal, to question our cultural assumptions, perceptions of difference, and tolerance towards its expression. In the following discussion, I would like to examine how the Christians and monsters believed to inhabit India appear as secondary bodies through which the possibility of their interpreters' social practices can be explored (ib. 281) and their collective fears articulated. As I hope to show, they can also serve a more sinister process whereby a formerly tolerant society became obsessed with pollution, danger and subversion from both without and within. To illustrate this point, I will today look at a seminal text from this period that wonderfully exhibits this heterological process. In his epic account of the Portuguese imperial venture, Camoens took the image of India delineated in classical and medieval literature and injected it with a potent dose of *Realpolitik*.

Luís Vaz de Camoens was born in 1524, the year that Vasco da Gama died. His family was Galician and of the lesser nobility. They had, however, gained status when his grandfather married into the Gama family. Camoens's father, Simão Vaz de Camoens, had gone to the East as a ship's captain. Off the coast of Goa, he was shipwrecked and died. Despite the early loss of his father, Camoens's youth was nevertheless fortunate. He studied at Coimbra, receiving a

solid grounding in Latin, history, mythology, and Italian literature. These student days comprised the happiest period of his life and were often evoked in his later poetry. They contributed to an idyllic vision of his homeland that would sustain him through his difficult years of exile.

After his studies, Camoens returned to Lisbon in 1544. Due to an unfortunate love affair, he was exiled by royal decree. Another account claims that his banishment was self-imposed. In either case, he went to Ceuta as a common soldier in 1547 where he lost his right eye in combat. Camoens thus experienced first hand at a young age the losses of Portuguese empire building. He was repatriated in 1549. Shortly after his return to Lisbon, however, he was involved in a brawl where he wounded a court official and was thrown in prison. Friends interceded on his behalf and, as a condition of his pardon, he was sent to India in 1553 for what was to be three years of military service and ended up consuming seventeen years of his life. During this time, Camoens served as a common soldier and an administrator. All the while, he was hard at work writing poetry and composing *The Lusiads*, the epic story of Gama's voyage to India and the history of Portuguese exploration surrounding it.

In 1556, he was appointed Trustee for the Dead and Absent in Macao. There, Camoens led a fairly comfortable existence for several years until he was relieved of the post due to the machinations of a compatriot who coveted his appointment. Camoens was then sent back to Goa to face trumped-up charges. On route, he was shipwrecked at the mouth of the Mekong River, barely escaping with his life, as legend has it, while holding the manuscript of his epic poem above his head and out of the water. The poet made his way back to Goa in 1561 where he remained for six more years (several of which were spent in prison) until he was finally exonerated for his alleged administrative malfeasance in Macao. After so many travails, Camoens longed to return home and to see *The Lusiads* and his collected poems (*Parnasso de Luis de Camoens*) published. Thanks to a friendly captain, he got as far as Mozambique in 1567, where he spent two more years, lacking the money necessary to pay for his trip back to Portugal. It was only when his friend, the historian Diogo do Couto, passed through Mozambique, discovered his lamentable state,

and took up a collection to pay his return fare, that Camoens was able to resume his journey home. During the last leg of his trip, the manuscript of his poetry was stolen.

Camoens reached Lisbon in 1570, just as the city was recovering from one of its periodic outbursts of the plague. Upon his arrival, Camoens was shocked to see how what he had envisioned during his many years of exile as the native virtues of his race had wilted under prosperity and how the people at home did not realize at what cost the empire had been built. In this mood of deep disillusionment, Camoens penned the Prologue, Dedicatory, and the Epilogue to his epic. *The Lusíads* passed the censor and was finally published in 1572 at which point it met with reasonable success.

The times, however, were catastrophic for Portugal. Between 1542 and 1550, João III had been realistic enough to jettison four of the eight North African strongholds. Sebastião, however, was more of an idealist and religious crusader who proved to be less interested in mercenary pursuits, navigation, and commerce. In an ill-fated decision, Sebastião decided to take on the Moslems definitively. He believed that the North African arena provided the strategic site for this venture and embarked on a disastrous invasion of Alcácer-Kebir in 1578 with 25,000 soldiers and 500 vessels. While this force might have been sufficient to safeguard all of Portugal's holdings in Asia, it was not adequate to confront the Moors in Africa. In merely four hours of pitched battle, 8000 Portuguese soldiers were slain and 15,000 enslaved. Less than 100 survived to bring the news of the defeat back home. This disaster was then compounded the next year when another plague broke out in Lisbon. Such were the dire conditions in which Camoens found Lisbon and Portugal upon his return. He was already physically and spiritually broken from his long ordeal in the East. The misfortunes of his country weighed heavily upon him and aggravated his despair. Camoens predicted that he would not only die *in* the country he so loved, but would also die *with* it. And, indeed, on June 10, 1580, he succumbed, barely missing the ascension of Philip II of Spain to the throne of the united peninsula.

As you well know, the title of the epic refers to the “sons of Lusús,” the mythical first settler of Portugal and companion of

Bacchus. The sons of Lusus are, therefore, the Portuguese. Camoens took Virgil's scheme for *The Aeneid* as the model for the development of his own theme: the noble deeds of a people from the beginning of their history to the poet's own time. Just as Virgil had placed part of his story in the mouth of Aeneas, much of the Portuguese saga is recounted by Vasco da Gama to the King of Malindi. Camoens not only chose *The Aeneid* as his model, but as a challenge. Whereas Virgil sang of "arms and men," Camoens claimed to sing of an entire nation of heroes.

Like *The Aeneid*, *The Lusids* centers on the storm-tossed mariner who ventures into the unknown to found a second Roman empire. Gama's voyage and the Portuguese confrontation with the Infidel serve as the central plot of the poem. The poet proclaims that the Portuguese in the age of discovery are more valiant than the heroes of antiquity. It was the task of the modern bard to sing their epic venture.

The action begins at the geographical point where Bartholomeo Dias had turned back from venturing further eastward. The gods of Olympus discover Gama's ships sailing up the east coast of Africa. In the typical epic fashion, the first canto presents the classical pantheon choosing sides whether to favor the Portuguese venture or thwart it. The Portuguese are thus well under way, after much toil and danger, when the gods of Olympus meet in council to decide if the navigators should be permitted to reach India. Bacchus, in particular, positions himself as Portugal's implacable enemy. He is jealous, lest the Portuguese outshine his own rule in India and eclipse his fame. Venus and Mars support and champion the Portuguese. Venus favors them because their language is similar to Latin and they remind her of her beloved Romans. Jupiter is, at this point, neutral.

In Mozambique, the Portuguese encounter an unknown race for the first time. They ask the initial questions: "Who are these people, what is their race and customs? Whose subjects are they? And their religion?" (1.45) (See Sample 1) The Portuguese are initially impressed with the natives who are cheerful, drink wine, and speak Arabic. When questioned regarding the purpose of their travels, the Portuguese respond that they seek the lands of the East, where the

Indus flows. They inquire about India and its inhabitants. (See Sample 2) The natives answer that they are Moslems and inform the Portuguese that the other natives are pagans and uncivilized. The Moslems claim to have settled in Mozambique and offer to provide the Portuguese with a pilot who might lead them to India. This encounter is presented as congenial. The Moslem governor asks to see their arms out of curiosity, while in fact he is already plotting treachery (1.67). It appears that, as soon as he learned they are Christian, he began to foster an irrational hatred for the Portuguese and to plot their destruction. Although promising to bring the Portuguese into contact with native Christians, the governor, in fact, plans to deliver them to a large contingent of Moslems. Gama thwarts these machinations and escapes from Mozambique. He also succeeds in avoiding a subsequent Moslem ambush orchestrated by Bacchus. Unscathed, the Portuguese arrive safely in Mombasa. The first canto ends with the poet lamenting the fickleness of fate. (See Sample 3)

Canto 2 opens with Bacchus once again plotting the destruction of the Portuguese. The scene of Gama's visit to the Hindu temple had earlier been described in the anonymous first-person log of Gama's first voyage, the *Roteiro*, and Ludovigo de Varthema's *Itinerario*. In the *Roteiro*, Gama misreads the Hindu temple as a Christian church containing a monstrous image of the Virgin. In contrast, Varthema deludes neither himself nor his readers. He describes the temple as it is, replete with standard representations of Hindu deities in their horrific manifestations. Varthema was not constrained by any larger political or religious project. He also did not need to promote any fantasy regarding Christian Indians. Varthema simply describes the scene and questions whether Gama was mistaken regarding what is obviously a Hindu temple or cynically indulging the Samorin in some sort of power-play. Camoens, however, presents the same episodes as a plot perpetrated by Bacchus (2.10–11). In the historical accounts, Gama's initial misprision clearly anticipates all subsequent conflicts. In Camoens, the temple visit and the ensuing animosities result from the trickery of a hostile god not from any fault of the Portuguese. Whereas the travel narratives suggest a strategic misunderstanding of the religious context on

the part of the Portuguese, the epic, in contrast, depicts the Portuguese not as confused or mistaken, but merely deluded by the contrivance of a false altar and a bad painting of the Virgin. Moreover, it is not Vasco da Gama who is deceived, but two convict-sailors whom he had sent ashore. This important initial scene between the Portuguese and the Indians that the historical accounts treat with circumspection – do the Portuguese encounter real, albeit heretical, Indian Christians, are they duped or engaged in an initially dishonest and duplicitous game of their own, or was the reality of the Hindu temple clear for anyone to see – is simply presented in the epic as a case of divine mischief. The epic consistently portrays the Portuguese as adventurers in search of both Indian and Christian allies, not the pirates that appear in the historical records. They are civilized explorers, not soldiers of fortune. This positive depiction is further delineated in cantos 3 through 9, when Gama recounts all the glorious and heroic exploits of the Portuguese to the King of Malindi.

He begins this narrative by relating key episodes from Portugal's history beginning with the tragic story of Inês de Castro and concluding with the poet's ruminations on the power of love. Canto 4 focuses on Portuguese maritime prowess and conquests. King Manuel had always dreamed of reaching the Ganges and the Indus Rivers. Toward this end, he dispatched Covilha to India. When this expedition did not bear the desired fruit, the king then sent forth Gama. This canto ends with the curious scene involving the old man of Restelo, to which we will return later. Canto 5 opens with Gama's voyage proper, presented by Camoens as an achievement without any parallel among the ancients. The initial challenge the fleet encounters is the giant Adamastor who personifies the Cape of Good Hope. Thanks to their cunning, the Portuguese are able to escape the monster's clutches and continue on their journey.

In Canto 6, the King of Malindi assigns Gama a competent and honest pilot who will lead them on the remainder of their voyage to India. Bacchus continues to plot mayhem against them by stirring up a storm that almost causes their total destruction. Venus intercedes once again to bring the Portuguese safely to India. Canto 7 presents the sailor Velosa who relates the tale of the Twelve of England, a

dozen Portuguese noblemen who had journeyed to England to defend the honor of a group of aggrieved English court ladies when no English nobles were brave enough to champion them. It also introduces the Moor Monsaide who instructs the Portuguese on India, its people, and customs (7.37–40). Here, India is reduced to its classic markers—caste, untouchability, and Pythagorean philosophy. In matters of the flesh, we are told, the Indians indulge in monstrous sexual practices.

The scene with the governor or Samorin of Calicut offers a parallel to Virgil's depiction of Aeneas's shield. The Samorin boards Gama's ship and is intrigued by the heroic scenes depicted on its banners and asks for clarification. Gama's description of the scenes depicted on the banners allows the poet to describe further instances of Portuguese bravery. The glorification of Portuguese valor that concludes canto 7 provides a subtle transition to canto 8 and its opening reflection on fame. Just as in the case of the temple visit, Camoens's version of Gama's encounter with the Samorin of Calicut differs considerably from that of the *Roteiro* and Varthema's *Itinerario*. In the *Roteiro*, Gama's men are detained once they bring merchandise ashore. They suspect Moslem treachery. It is only after they exchange merchandise that they can ransom their freedom and rejoin the ships. In contrast, Varthema does not speculate about the animosity of the Moslems. Rather he provides detailed information on the excellent conditions under which trade was conducted in Calicut before the arrival of the Portuguese, suggesting that they alone were responsible for the breakdown of the commercial venture. In the epic, however, Gama is never to blame; he is never outwitted in his encounters with the Samorin nor is his or his crew's nobility, courage, and clear sightedness ever called into question. The middle cantos of the epic punctuate the narration of Portuguese history with a series of meditations on key themes: love (canto 3), hubris (canto 4), collective achievement (canto 5), heroism (canto 7), devotion (canto 7), and fame (canto 8), that all form the subject matter traditional to the epic format.

Camoens's poem now moves toward its conclusion. Canto 9 continues to recount the hostilities: Gama seizes Moslem merchants in order to exchange them for the two Portuguese factors that had

been detained. The Portuguese then beat a hasty retreat, aided by Venus who brings them to the Island of Love as a reward for all their labors. Here Tethys and the Nereids frolic with the mariners. Tethys, herself, is paired off with Gama. The epic concludes with the banquet of the Nereids and the sailors. The nymph Tethys then foretells the Portuguese achievements in Africa, Egypt, Arabia, Persia, India, and Ceylon in the fifty years following Gama's voyage. She leads him up to a mountaintop where she reveals to him the structure of the universe, prophesies the dominion of his Portuguese successors, and offers a view of what the Portuguese will still discover. In this geographical description, she mentions, of course, the monsters one expects to find in all the descriptions of India. Tethys also points out St. Thomas's tomb in Mylapore. She evokes his martyrdom in India as a challenge to those Portuguese who sit at home rather than preaching the faith" (10.119). (See Sample 4) Although the Portuguese are "the salt of the earth," she explains, they corrupt themselves in their own country (10.120). Since "this is a dangerous theme" (Mas passo esta matéria perigosa), Tethys decides to move on with her exposition. But, it is exactly this dangerous discussion that is at the heart of Camoens poem. The issue here is twofold: what are the Portuguese doing at home to protect the faith in the face of the Protestant Reformation and what are they doing in India? They have usurped the name of missionaries. However, both at home and abroad they do not preach and live the faith. Quite the contrary. Although Tethys says she will avoid such dangerous discussions, it is clear that Camoens has no intention of doing so himself. In the poem's conclusion he advises his readers, foremost among who is the King of Portugal himself, to look beyond this tale of valor to see a lament of defeat. The epic thus ends with the poet's ruminations on the decline of the heroic temper and the rise of decadence. Camoens exhorts Sebastian to hold in higher regard those who serve overseas and to take counsel only from those who have experience. (See Sample 5)

In order to publish *The Lusíads*, Camoens had to pass the censor. He had first to resolve the problem of the presence of gods and goddesses in a Christian epic that exalted the Portuguese nation and its mission of faith. Fearful lest the mythological references

throughout the poem arouse insurmountable objections from the authorities, Camoens inserted an additional stanza in the last canto. This stanza (10.82) declares that the gods are all fabulous and are introduced as fantasy to render the poem harmonious. They are “but creatures of fable, figments of man’s blindness and self-deception” (“Fingidos de mortal e cego engano”). They were used in order to “turn agreeable verses” (“So para fazer versos deleitosos”). In an entire poem whose plot is grounded in the sphere of the marvelous, this addition has appeared to critics and readers alike as the poet’s attempt to move beyond the realm of myth. From a dramatic point of view, however, the presence of the gods and goddesses was necessary. Their human emotions, especially their jealousy, venality, and partiality, drive the plot. As gods, they could be more exaggerated and symbolic than human protagonists. The retention of classical mythology also provides a figurative interpretation of nature. The Portuguese story was nothing if not a tale of victory over nature. In addition, the presence of goddesses and the nymphs break up the monotony of what was essentially a male narrative. To an audience familiar with epics in the spirit of Ariosto, exclusively male-dominated action would seem tedious. For this same reason, Camoens added chivalric tales, such as the story of the Twelve of England, Inês de Castro, and the marriage of the mariners and the nymphs. On the level of plot, such scenes lighten the narrative with a romantic overlay. On a symbolic level, episodes such as the nuptials of the sailors and the nymphs figuratively represent Portugal’s mastery over the seas.

These chivalric tales also speak of a virtuous Portugal and echo Camoens’s own youth spent at Coimbra. He fed his idyllic vision of Portugal by constructing a poem filled with the tales of knightly exploits culled from classical and European epic literature as well as the historical accounts of the age of discovery. The poet was thus able to wed this ideal of Portugal’s greatness to the documentation found in the works of his friends, Gaspar Corrêa’s *Lendas da Índia*, the scientist Garcia da Orta’s *Colloquios dos Simples e Drogas da Índia*, and the historian Diogo do Couto’s *Decadas*. By interweaving such elements of history, romance, allegory, and the supernatural, Camoens enlivened what might have seemed a rather monotonous

plot of an ocean voyage. In the midst of this variety, however, one episode stands out as unique. This episode, approximately half way through the poem, has continually baffled readers and seems to call into question the entire meaning of the poem. It is this scene that I would like to look at in greater depth.

As the fleet is about to set sail for India on July 8, 1497, a crowd of citizens has congregated on the banks of the Tagus River, to be exact, on the Restelo beach near the Belém church in a western suburb of Lisbon. Among the crowd, two women are heard expressing their fears – one a wife, the other a mother. They are surrounded by the laments of the elderly and the young. An old man, unnamed like the women, stands out in the crowd. He addresses the men on the ships (*nós no mar*) and condemns as futile their lust for power and desire for worldly renown. Craving power and thirsting for fame are follies. Honor is a fraudulent pleasure to which only vapid souls succumb. It causes people to forsake their loved ones. Power and fame are not illustrious and noble goals, but merit the obloquy of infamy that is justly punished with the loss of peace of mind and earthly belongings, including entire realms. (See Sample 6) The old man then predicts that the promise of gold mines and kingdoms will bring doom to Portugal and its people. (See Sample 7) Just as Adam was exiled from Paradise, so too the Portuguese, as the true sons of Adam, will be driven by this folly that is disguised as enterprise and valor. They are an unhappy race, the heirs of madmen whose sin and disobedience have doomed them to exile from paradise as well as from the divine state of simple and tranquil innocence. Their craving for lucre and glory has transformed Portugal's golden age into the age of iron and destruction.

(See Sample 8) The old man continues to berate the men. If their minds are set on risking their lives in savage warfare for the sake of Christianity, they should continue to fight the Moor at their gates, in nearby North Africa. The Ishmaelite is at hand, he proclaims; they need not go to the ends of the earth to confront him and, in the process, depopulate and wreck Portugal and squander its resources. By mentioning the pompous titles of “Ruler of India, Persia, Arabia and Ethiopia,” the Old Man is mocking King Manuel whom along with his successors had actually assumed these grandiose titles. (See

Sample 9) He predicts that those who go forth deserve to suffer in Hell and should never be renowned or even remembered. No poet should immortalize them and their names should die with them. The Old Man then makes allusions to the Argonauts, Prometheus, and Icarus as setting bad examples of excessive boldness. As he is continues to harangue them, the Portuguese set sail.

The reader might rightfully ask what this accusatory diatribe achieves in a poem whose central idea is the celebration of Gama's voyage as an immortal heroic feat. Indeed, commentators have been quick to note that the old man's speech voiced legitimate concerns that had been articulated in general assemblies and royal council meetings during the reigns of João II, Manuel, and João III (Moser 1980: 141). In the epic context, where we only hear the voices of the gods and heroes, the old man as the voice of the common man stands out to admonish the nation and even mock the ambition of the king. He is a very un-epic figure placed in the middle of an epic to vilify those who are about to depart as well as those very actions and deeds the poem presumes to celebrate. Does the old man merely reflect the thoughts that were bruited about in the political fora of the time or does he offer the poet's deconstruction of the entire epic project? A possible answer to this question can be found in Camoens's work as a whole. And, indeed, upon closer inspection of his extant poetry, we discover that complaints similar to those of the Old Man of Restelo were not uncommon in this corpus of work. In fact, when the Old Man condemns the Portuguese military (see Sample 10), he echoes sentiments the poet expressed in descriptions of his experiences as a soldier.

In 1553, Camoens was forced to participate in a retaliatory offensive on the Kingdom of Pimenta for attacking property of the King of Porca, an ally of the Portuguese. In an assault on Chembé, the Portuguese massacred everything in sight. Camoens also took part in forays into the Persian Gulf, where the Portuguese committed acts of piracy on Turkish ships. Here too, he was forced to engage in slaughter, not battle. The Portuguese ruthlessly killed the Turkish crews who had surrendered. In many cases, they fed them alive to the sharks. These forays of unmitigated butchery were more abominable than Chembé, where at least the Portuguese engaged an army in

battle array. In India and in the Gulf, the Portuguese butchered not just sworn enemies, but also merchants, women, children and animals. In contrast to the heroic tone of the rest of the epic, the speech of the old man of Restello offers a forceful reflection on this reality. It communicates Camoens's disgust of his forced service in India and the piratical incursions in the Gulf.

We can also find an echo of Camoens's feelings regarding the wanton brutality of the Portuguese in India expressed in his poems, such as the "Disparates da India" ("Follies in India") (Camoens 1985: I.95–101), where Camoens forcefully condemns the social and political shame of the Portuguese in India. He specifically attacks those who brought his country to ridicule – "the rich, overbearing, pretentious ne'er do well youth, immoral moralists, hypocrites, and merciless greedy judges" (Hart 1962:124). (See Sample 11) He generally castigates those who have brought dishonor to the proud name of his country. He ends each verse with an apt proverb and thus skewers Portuguese injustice and corruption in India. (See Sample 12) Camoens also condemned Portuguese decadence in India in the *redondilha* "Ao desconcerto do mondo," where he wrote:

Ever in this world saw I
 Good men suffer grave torments,
 But even more –
 Enough to terrify –
 Men who live out evil lives
 Reveling in pleasure and in content. (Hart 1962: 111)
 (See Sample 13)

However, the inner reality of empire for Camoens was most fully articulated in "Cá neste Babilónia, donde mana:" (See Sample 14)

Here is this Babylon, that's festering
 forth as much evil as the rest of the earth;
 Here where true love deprecates his worth,
 as his powerful mother pollutes everything.
 Here where evil is refined and good is cursed,
 and tyranny, not honor, has its way;
 Here where the monarchy in disarray,

blindly attempts to mislead God, and worse.
Here in this labyrinth, where Royalty,
willingly chooses to succumb
before the Gates of Greed and Infamy;

Here in this murky chaos and delirium, I carry out my tragic destiny,
but never will I forget you, Jerusalem! (Camoens 2005: 72–73)

Lisbon is Jerusalem (Zion), where Camoens was born and loved, the place from which all virtues and fine qualities sprang, the site where civilization was to be found, and the home from which he was exiled to the Babylon of Portuguese India. Here, as in Camoens's memories of his youth, Portugal holds an exalted position. Any memories of its cruelty and vice have dimmed with time and distance. It epitomizes for Camoens what it is to be civilized. However, her unworthy sons have dragged civilization into the dirt, trampling Portugal's glory in Goa with their greed, false pride, and arrogance. In Portuguese India, all lusts reign supreme and pure love lies unsought. Evil waxes worse and all good is spurned. Monarchs seek blind blundering. Tyranny is taken for honor. God is cheated by vain words. It is a chaos that the Portuguese have created for themselves. The poet asks in a longer elegiac version of the same poem how one cannot long for the Zion of Portugal after having lived in such a place and earned one's daily crusts of bread in such conditions. (See Sample 15) In this poetry, Camoens declared war against the vice and corruption that was rampant in Portuguese India. He gave full vent to his resentment and indignation. While Portugal appears as the flower of European nations, Portuguese India is presented as the antithesis of its purported national aspirations.

Given the depth of the poet's disgust with the Portuguese venture in India expressed in these poems, the warning voiced by the old man of Restelo is not incongruous. Camoens's genius was that he chose to articulate these feelings in the midst of an epic dedicated to singing the praise of the Portuguese endeavor. To a certain extent, he used the epic format to write an anti-epic. Whether he set out to write an anti-epic or the anti-heroic sentiments grew out of the process is not something we can answer today. But what we might call the

paradox of an anti-epic epic can be seen in the poet's simultaneous longing for and condemnation of Portugal that resulted from his prolonged personal experience of India and exile.

In *The Lusiads*, Camoens dealt with key scenes described in the Portuguese and Italian travel narratives to India that I have investigated. I have offered a brief *aperçu* of these parallel descriptions. In the episode in the Hindu temple and in his encounters with the Samorin of Calicut, the historical accounts challenge any script that the Portuguese were in control of the situation or even honest and forthright in their dealings with the Indians they encountered. Camoens displaces any overt criticism of their behavior or motivations by placing blame either on the gods or the Moslems. He works within the constraints of the epic whose proper subject is the strife of men. Heroic events effect changes in conscience and in social conditions. Epic, however, does not seek to discover the causes or explain why events occur in human terms. It is the will of the gods. Epic does not abrogate the authority of history. Rather, epic sings, on an albeit heroic pitch, the fateful strife for the realization of a great collective ideal. The epic genre forced the poet to problematize the myths of the past or create new myths. When we take into account the tirade of the Old Man of Restello (its central position in the poem and its radically anti-heroic message), we see that Camoens was already questioning, if not deconstructing, the message of his heroic song. Using the tropes provided by classical and medieval literature, he was already developing a new myth. Camoens was asking us where, in fact, civilization resides and where do we find barbarism? Who are the monsters? Where are the true Christians?

In canto 7, when the Portuguese land in India, we see this new myth of Christian identity foregrounding the narrative. Portugal's brand of Christianity, its devotion to the faith, is what sets it apart from the other nations of Europe. As the seafarers arrive off the coast, the poet launches into a hymn of praise to the Portuguese nation, their small numbers are outweighed by their devotion to the Mother Church and their bravery. The Infidels have not forsaken their aggressive designs against the true faith. It is just that now Europe fails to rise in its defense. Were it not for the Portuguese, all would be lost. The epic poet boasts that although the Lusitanians are

but a very small part of mankind, nothing prevents them from conquering the lands of the infidel. When one compares them to the headstrong Germans, the dour English, and the unworthy French, they are superior in terms of courage and faith (Camoens 1952: 161–62) (See Sample 16) Clearly, for Camoens, Western Christians are no longer defined vis à vis their fictitious Indian counterparts, but in relation to each other.

Nevertheless, to be a Portuguese Christian in the age of discovery is still bound up with the Indian venture. It is ultimately through the conquest of India that the Portuguese distinguish themselves from lesser European Christians. India presents the means by which the Portuguese can prove themselves. What has changed is that the earlier myth of Indian Christians and monsters has shifted to form a new myth of ideal Portuguese Christians and those who have lost their valor. (See Sample 17) In *The Lusíads*, this myth allowed the Portuguese to assert a cohesive social identity and declare their cultural superiority. The social identity activated by this myth affected corollary sentiments of estrangement both from “other” European Christians and those Portuguese in India who had strayed from their heroic and historic mission.

As noted, canto 10 presents the nymph Tethys revealing to Gama the structure of the universe. To relieve the endless catalogue of future Portuguese exploits, Camoens inserts into the narrative a long excursus on St. Thomas’s miracles and martyrdom. His example serves as a reproach to all indolent would-be missionaries and a critique of the entire imperial venture. The Portuguese native virtues are seen to have wilted due to prosperity. The people at home no longer realize at what cost their empire has been built. This is the inner reality of empire of which Camoens foreshadowed in the harangue of the old man of Restelo.

By the time Camoens completed *The Lusíads*, the epic days were over. The poem concludes with a prophetic vision suggesting the demise of the Portuguese Indian empire. Although the Portuguese achievement is presented as part of providential design to win the world for the faith and Camoens presents it as part of God’s purpose for the universe as a whole, canto 10 clearly shows how the Portuguese fight for the faith is ultimately determined by the spiritual

values of Europe. Camoens's need for a new myth suggests that these values are bankrupt and that the forces of evil and darkness will, in fact, prevail. The myth of the Christian ideal, which in the fifteenth century had been displaced to India, experienced a transformation by the mid-sixteenth century. The binary Christian ideal/pagan monster is now relocated within the imperial subject. India, once the site of a possible Christian utopia, has now become the stage for European dishonor and corruption. Let us not forget that when Columbus arrived in "the Indies," he wrote in the famous letter to Sanchez that he did not find the monsters he expected to find there. I think we can safely conclude that those monsters that were absent from Columbus's letter become re-inscribed in the work of Camoens. However, these monsters are no longer the Indian other, but the Portuguese self, spawned not on the edges of the world, but on the banks of the Tagus.

Samples

- 1 "Que gente será esta? (em si diziam) Que costumes, que leis,
que rei teriam?" (1.45)
- 2 Os Portugueses somos do Ocidente;
Imos buscando as terras do Oriente. (1.50)
A terra Oriental que o Indo rega; ...
- Se entre vós a verdade não se nega –
Quem sois, que terra é esta que habitais,
Ou se tendes da Índia alguns sinais. (1.152)
- 3 Onde pode acolher-se um fraco humano,
Onde terá segura a curta vida,
Que não se arme e se indigne o Céu sereno
Contra um bicho da terra tão pequeno? (1.106)
- 4 Olhai que, se sois sal e vos danais
Na Pátria, onde profeta ninguem é,
Com que se selgarão em nossos dias
(Infiéis deixo) tantas heresias? (10.119)

- 5 No mais, Musa, no mais, que a Lira tenho
Destemperada e a voz enrouquecida,
E não do canto, mas de ver que venho
Cantar a gente surda e endurecida.
O favor com que mais se acende o engenho,
Não no dá a Patriá, não, que está metida
No gosto da cobiça e na rudeza
Dũa austera, apagada e vil tristeza,
E não sei por que influxo de destino
Não tem um ledor orgulho e geral gosto,
Que os ânimos levanta de contínuo
A ter para trabalhos ledor o rosto.
Pos isso vós, ó Rei, que por divino
Conselho estais no régio sólio posto,
Olhai que sois (e vede as outras gentes)
Senhor só de vassallos excelentes! (10.145–46)
- 6 Ó glória de mandar ! ó vâ cobiça
Desta vaidada, a quem chamamos Fama!
Ó fraudulento gosto, que se atíça
Cũa aura popular, que honra se chama!
Que castigo tamanho e que justiça
Fazes no peito vão que muita te ama!
Que mortes, que perigos, que tormentas,
Que crueldades neles exprimentas!
Dura inquietação d'alma e da vida,
Fonte de desamparos e adultérios,
Sagaz consumidora conhecida
De fazendas, de reinos e de impérios!
Chaman-te ilustre, chaman-te subida,
Sendo digna de infames vitupérios;
Chaman-te Fama e Glória soberana,
Nomes com quem se o povo néscio engana. (4.95–96)
- 7 A que novos desastres determinas
De levar estes Reinos e esta gente?
Que perigos, que mortes lhe destinas
Debaixo dalgum nome preminente?
Que promessas de reinos e de minas

De ouro, que lhe farás tão facilmente?
 Que famas lhe prometerás? Que histórias?
 Que triunfos? Que palmas, que vitórias? (4.97)

- 8 Mas ó tu, geração daquele insano
 Cujos pecado e desobediência
 Não somente do Reino soberano
 Te pôs neste desterro e triste ausência,
 Mas inda doutro estado mais que humano,
 Da quieta e da simples inocência,
 Idade de ouro, tanto te privou,
 Que na de ferro e de armas te deitou. (4.98)
- 9 Não tens junto contigo O Ismaelita,
 Com quem sempre terás guerras sobejas?
 Não segue ele do Arábio a lei maldita,
 Se tu pela de Christo só pelejas?
 Não tem cidades mil, terra infinita
 Se terras e riqueza mais desejas?
 Não é ele par armas esforçado,
 Se queres por vitórias ser louvado?

Deixas criar às portas o inimigo,
 Por ires buscar outro de tão longe,
 Por quem se despovoe o Reino antigo,
 Se enfragueça e se vá deitando a longe!
 Buscas o incerto e incógnito perigo,
 Por que a Fama te exalte e te lisonje,
 Chamando-te senhor, com larga cópia,
 Da Índia, Pérsia, Arábia e de Etiópia! (4.100–1)

- 10 Já que nesta gostosa vaidade
 Tanto enlevas a leve fantasia,
 Já que à bruta crueza e feridade
 Puseste nome esforço e valentia,
 Já que prezas em tanta quantidade
 O desprezo da vida, que devia
 De ser sempre estimada, pois que já
 Temeu tanto perdê-la quem a dá. (4.99)

- 11 Que dizeis duns, que as entranhas
Lhe estão ardendo em cobiça,
E, se têm mando, a justiça
Fazem de teias de aranhas
Com suas hipocrisias,
Que são de vós as espias?
Pera os pequenos, uns Neros,
Pera os grandes, nada feros
Pois tu, parvo, não sabias
Que lá vão leis, onde querem cruzados? (Camoens 1985:97)

- 12 Ó vós, que sois secretários
Das consciências reais,
Que entre os homens estais
Por senhores ordinários:
Porque não pondes um freio
Ao roubar, que vai sem meio,
Debaixo de bom governo?
Pois um pedaço de inferno
Por pouco dinheiro alheio
Se vende a mouro e a judeu.

Porque a mente, afeiçoada
Sempre à real dignidade
Vos faz julgar por bondade
A malícia desculpada.
Move a presença real
Ûa afeição natural,
Que logo inclina ao juiz
A seu favor. E não diz
Um rifão muito geral
Que o abade, donde canta, daí janta? (Camoens 1985:1.100–01)

- 13 Os bons vi sempre passar
No Mundo graves tormentos;
E pera mais me espantar,
Os maus vi sempre nadar
Em mar de contentamentos. (Camoens 1985: 1.136)

14 Cá neste Babilónia, donde mana
 Matéria a quanto mal o mundo cria,
 Cá onde o puro Amor não tem valia,
 Que a Mãe, que manda mais, tudo profana;

Cá, onde o mal se afina e bem se dana,
 E pode mais que a honra a tirania;
 Cá, onde a errada e cega Monarquia
 Cuida que um nome vão a Deus engana;

Cá nesta labirinto, onde a nobreza
 Com esforço e saber pedindo vão;
 Às portas da cobiça? e da vileza;
 Ca neste escuro caos de confusão,
 Comprindo o curso estou da Natureza.
 Vê se me esquecerei de ti, Sião! (Camoens 1985: 1.256–7)

15 às portas da cobiça e da vileza
 estes netos de Agar estão sentados
 em bancos de torpíssima riqueza,
 todos de tirania marchetados.
 É do feio Alcorão suma a largeza
 que tem para que sejam perdoados
 de quantos erros cometendo estão. (Camoens 1980: 3.521)

16 A vós, ó geração de Luso, digo,
 Que tão pequena parte sois mundo,
 Não diga inda no mundo, mas no amigo
 Cural de quem governa o Céu rotundo;
 Vós, a quem não somente algum perigo
 Estorva conquistar o povo imundo,
 Mas nem cobiça ou pouca obediência
 Da Madre que nos Céus está em essência;

Vós Portugueses, poucos quanto fortes,
 Que o fraco poder vosso não pesais;
 Vós, que à custa de vossas várias mortes
 A lei da vida eterna dilatais;
 Assi do Céu deitadas são as sortes

Que vós, por muito poucos que sejais,
Muito façais na santa Cristandade,
Que tanto, ó Christo, exaltas a humildade!

Vedelos Alemães, soberbo gado,
Que por tão largos, campos se apacenta
Do successor de Pedro rebelado,
Novo pastor e nova seita inventa;
Vedelo em feias guerras ocupado
(Que inda co cego error se não contenta!)
Não contra o superbissimo Otomano,
Mas por sair do jugo soberano.
Vedelo duro Inglês ...

- Pois de ti, Galo indigno, que direi?
Que o nome “Christianíssimo” quiesete. (7.2–6)
- 17 Pois que direi daqueles que em delícias,
Que o vil ócio no mundo traz consigo,
Gastam as vidas, logram as divícias,
Esquecidos de seu valor antigo?
Nascem da tirania inimicícias,
Que o povo forte tem de si inimigo. (7.8)

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