

The Monstrous Lineage of Adamastor and His Critics

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Abstract. This article considers the figure of Adamastor in *Os Lusíadas* and, in particular, Adamastor's status as a monster and how this becomes implicated into criticism of the poem. The article argues that Adamastor's monstrosity invests him with a special hermeneutic currency. Comments are made on monsters in literary and cultural criticism. Then, Manuel de Faria e Sousa's commentary on the Adamastor episode in his 1639 edition of *Os Lusíadas* is analyzed. In this text, Adamastor's monstrous body is key to establishing him as a contravening principle to Portuguese imperialism.

Halfway through *Os Lusíadas* and halfway through the voyage from Portugal to India that serves as the historical basis of the poem, Vasco da Gama and his fleet approach the southern tip of Africa. Known as the Cape of Storms and later as the Cape of Good Hope, or Cabo da Boa Esperança, this locale looms famously on the fabled horizon of western seafaring as a danger to those who would attempt its passage. As Gama's eastward-bound sailors draw near, a black cloud appears and roils in the darkening sky, out of which an apparition soon takes shape—suddenly, thunderously, and terrifyingly, like a storm at sea. This apparition, whose name is Adamastor, towers above the ships and berates the mariners: how dare they violate the ancient geographical and nautical boundary at which he stands guard, how dare they presume to uncover secrets of nature and the sea. Adamastor, the “eclipsing menace” as Herman Melville would call him three

centuries later, delivers a series of prophecies to Vasco da Gama about the fate of the Portuguese explorers to follow in his footsteps that are as historically true as they are disastrous and tragic. On questioning by Gama, Adamastor relates his own tragic story, one of military and amorous defeat. A Titan, a giant of the earth, Adamastor rose in rebellion against Neptune and fell in love with the sea goddess Thetis, only then to be deceived at the moment of an arranged tryst. As punishment for his presumption in desiring the nymph, Adamastor was transformed, eternally, into the inhospitable and rocky terrain of the cape.

Adamastor is arguably Camões's most famous poetic creation, a feat of literary invention rivaling the composition of *Os Lusíadas* itself. Manoel Correa, an early editor (1613) and commentator of the poem, remarked apropos of the introduction of Adamastor in stanza 39 of canto V that "Não tenho palauras para encarecer a linguagẽ, propriedade, & eloquentia desta octaua, que realmente faz este fingimento & Metamorphosi que vay tratando deste Cabo de Boa Esperança, vêtagem as de Ouidio" (153r). Over time, the Adamastor episode has generated a mixture of awe and interpretive grappling that might be said to reflect Adamastor's own enigmatic nature.¹ He is, for instance, at once the anthropomorphic manifestation of the Cape of Good Hope and a nebulous, airy specter; he is fear and apprehension incarnate and an endpoint of geographic and cartographic knowledge, a numinous glimpse of "os segredos escondidos / Da natureza e do húmido elemento" (V.42.i-ii).² Adamastor is polysemous, an exegetical conundrum. Indeed, much of Camões's fame, both within Portugal and without, is linked to Adamastor and the polemic surrounding him. In this essay, I want first to focus on Adamastor's monstrosity, one of his principal characteristics, and argue that it is Adamastor's status as a monster that invests him with much of his hermeneutic currency. Then I will consider Manuel de Faria e Sousa's commentary on the Adamastor episode in his 1639 edition of *Os Lusíadas*, in which monstrosity underwrites broader theoretical issues relating to allegory and imperialism.

Let us begin by noting how Camões, through the voice of Vasco da Gama, describes the appearance of Adamastor:

...hũa figura
 Se nos mostra no ar, robusta e válida,
 De disforme e grandíssima estatura;
 O rosto carregado, a barba esquelida,
 Os olhos encovados, e a postura

Medonha e má, e a cor terrena e pálida;
 Cheios de terra e crespos os cabelos,
 A boca negra, os dentes amarelos.
 Tão grande era de membros, que bem posso
 Certificar-te que este era o segundo
 De Rodes estranhíssimo Colosso... (V.39-40.i-iii)

A few stanzas later, Gama remarks that “ia por diante o monstro horrendo, / Dizendo nossos Fados” (V.49.i-ii), and in so doing echoes Virgil’s description of Polyphemus as a “monstrum horrendum, informe, ingens” [“a monster, awful, shapeless, huge”] (*Aeneid*, III.v.657). Camões hence designates Adamastor as both a “figure” and a “monster.” Terry Cochran analyzes in detail the significance of *figura* as it relates to figurality, history, and discourse in this episode, and explores these issues in the context of the nineteenth-century polemic over Adamastor in the writings of José Agostinho de Macedo and others.³ If, on the one hand, we might read Adamastor through the abstracting label of *figura*, we can also and equally significantly read him as a “monstro,” a staple of Renaissance culture that in the poem is both an immediate, dramatic corporeality and a key metaphor of Camonian poesis. Camões’s designation of Adamastor as a monster, therefore, not only situates the apparition within a tradition of classical and epic monsters but also connects him to a contemporary critical practice of reading monsters as especially fecund cultural constructs that embody, among other things, notions of theology, history, science, aesthetics, and epistemology.

Perhaps one of the most interesting facts about Camões’s use of “monstro” to refer to Adamastor is that this is one of only three times the word appears in *Os Lusíadas*, a poem teeming with mythological beings, penned and first read in a time when the western fascination with the East and its *mirabilia* was firmly part of the European (textual) imaginary. The history of monsters in western culture has garnered considerable critical attention in recent years, especially monsters of the Middle Ages and Renaissance. Far too complex a subject to summarize adequately here, suffice it to say for the purposes of the current argument that the plethora of monsters reported to exist at the edges of the known world or in the fabulous realms of the East sprung from many discursive practices. Writers such as Marco Polo, John Mandeville, or Gómez de Santisteban (whose *Libro del infante don Pedro de Portugal* contains passages describing the kinds of monsters supposedly witnessed by Polo or

Mandeville) helped establish monsters and monstrous races in the imaginations of travelers, merchants, and explorers. There were also pamphlets and books on the teratological or medical monster (those with birth defects or deformities) as detailed in the famous treatise, *Des monstres et prodiges* (1573) by the French surgeon Ambroise Paré.⁴ This latter kind of monster could include the products of unnatural couplings (such as those between humans and animals) and is, in fact, the kind of “monstros” Camões refers to in canto X in Tethys’s survey of the globe to Vasco da Gama:

Olha o reino Arracão; olha o assento
De Pegu, que já monstros povoaram,
Monstros filhos do feio ajuntamento
Dhũa mulher e um cão, que sós se acharam.
Aqui soante arame no instrumento
Da geração costumão, o que usaram
Por manha da Rainha que, inventando
Tal uso, deitou fora o error nefando. (X.122)

The fact that this is the only use of *monstro* apart from the reference to Adamastor prompts an unavoidable comparison between the monsters of canto X and the specter at the end of Africa. The comparison suggests that, on one level at least, Camonian monstrosity relates to genealogical or lineal descent. Recall that, on interrogation by Vasco da Gama, Adamastor recounts his own monstrous ancestry by noting that “Fui dos filhos aspérrimos da Terra, / Qual Encélado, Egeu e o Centimano” (V.51.i-ii); the names here are all of giants, with Centimano (“cem mãos”) standing as the most obviously “monstrous.” Camões seems to imply that Adamastor’s lineage is “legitimate”—he can trace his origins back through mythology—while the eastern realm of Arakan is the site of unnatural lineage, a result of the “error nefando.”⁵ The claim to a legitimate (monstrous) lineage, one vindicated by the mythological histories of antiquity, allows Adamastor, in part, the privilege of his own historiographic voice. In the context of the Portuguese tradition of the *livros de linhagens* (a narrative genre that permeates the historical consciousness of *Os Lusíadas*) Adamastor’s narrativization of the past is one of the discursive behaviors that arrests Gama’s attention.

Yet the trait of Adamastor that most determines his monstrosity is his body. This gigantic body, which Camões takes pains to detail by describing

its limbs, hair, mouth, teeth, face, and beard, is monstrous because it is excessive and, in aesthetic terms, contravenes Renaissance notions of symmetry and proportion. It erupts precipitously into view and in so doing causes Vasco da Gama to react by declaring “Que esse estupendo / Corpo, certo, me tem maravilhado!” (V.49.iii-iv). Camões’s / Gama’s choice of “maravilhado” is significant since he is rehearsing the trope of marvel or wonder that the encounter with monsters traditionally triggered. Adamastor’s hypertrophic body occasions a temporary suspension of certainty that is the hallmark of *maravilha*. As an overwhelming moment of the embodiment of alterity, the strange, and the terrifying that not only causes wonder to Gama but subsequently to critics of the poem, Adamastor exemplifies the essence of the monstrous body as Jeffrey Jerome Cohen argues for it:

The monstrous body is pure culture. A construct and a projection, the monster exists only to be read: the monstium is etymologically “that which reveals,” “that which warns,” a glyph that seeks a hierophant. Like a letter on the page, the monster signifies something other than itself: it is always a displacement, always inhabits the gap between the time of upheaval that created it and the moment into which it is received, to be born again.... Monsters must be examined within the intricate mix of relations (social, cultural, and literary-historical) that generate them. (4-5)⁶

In this line of reasoning, Adamastor stands as a monstrous corporeality that beckons to be read within the expansionist logic of *Os Lusíadas*. Manuel de Faria e Sousa (1590-1649) does just that, and I now want to consider this critic’s interpretation of Adamastor’s monstrous body as a decisive moment in the critical history of the poem.

Faria e Sousa’s meticulously annotated two-volume edition of *Os Lusíadas*, published in Madrid in 1639, perhaps did more for establishing the contours of interpretive practice on the poem than has been recognized to date. Following the methods of earlier commentators (such as Manoel Correa), Faria e Sousa proceeds stanza-by-stanza, and provides a translation into Castilian of each stanza along with an often verse-by-verse critical commentary.⁷ He cites an impressive range of primary sources in his interpretations, and his edition contains detailed indices and word and author lists. Faria e Sousa argues for an allegorical reading of Camões’s poem that foregrounds its mythological underpinnings, and in so doing becomes one of Camões’s pre-eminent mythographers in his agenda to allegorize history through the mytho-

logical pantheon. While we might disagree with the critic's thesis that the allegorical structure of *Os Lusíadas* responds to nothing more than Camões's desire to represent the victory of the Catholic church in foreign lands, we cannot overlook the nuance of argument and detail Faria e Sousa often brings to the defense of this proposition. Whatever interpretive disagreement critics might have, Faria e Sousa's critical methodology is watertight.

One of the lengthiest disquisitions Faria e Sousa provides on any episode is on Adamastor. The critic repeatedly insists on Adamastor's monstrosity as central to his interpretation. In the religious narrative Faria e Sousa sees underlying the text, Adamastor unilaterally represents Mohammed and Islam as the enemy of Christendom. With the repeated claim that "este Gigante representa al demonio" (see, for example, 522 and 525) and that he is the head of "la torpeza Mauritana" (541),⁸ Faria e Sousa points to an understanding of Adamastor that moves beyond the simple, overall allegorical reading of the poem. For, as he inscribes Mohammed into the universe of *Os Lusíadas* through Adamastor, Faria e Sousa invests him with a theoretical importance as an expansionist negativity, a dark embodiment of the tenets of imperialism. Adamastor appears in the pages of the *Lusíadas comentadas* as a body and a force that impede the smooth (re-)mapping of the world according to a Christian cosmology. He threatens to unmap the world into diabolical chaos as a countermap of Christian imperialism. Adamastor's phantasmal and monstrous body arises from the tip of Africa as the cartographic principle, demonically inflected, driving expansionist movement.

Faria e Sousa builds this reading of the monster by construing Africa as solely and exclusively the seat of Islam, a gesture that effectively wipes Africa clean of its non-Islamic cultures, with which Portuguese colonists had been familiar for over two centuries. Underneath the apocalyptic identification of Adamastor as the "segundo Lucifer; porque muchos dixeron, que Mahoma era el Antecristo" (541), there also lies an awareness of a more immediate, historically present threat, namely, the fear of Islamic imperialism and, by extension, of Turkish resistance to Portuguese overseas colonies. This "estupenda fabula" (539), an embodiment of Mohammed and consequently of "toda la Morisma" (573), realizes his danger by mobilizing a Moorish "navegación," a term that for Faria e Sousa encompasses the idea of both a European itinerancy through the collective movement of ships and the overall exercise of imperial power. This inimical *navegación* recognizes that the Moors also possess a cartographic imperative in that they are just as capable as the Portuguese

of traveling across water and plotting and conquering parcels of space into which they will inscribe their infernal belief. The cartographic power Adamastor darkly wields is symbolized by Faria e Sousa's reading of his body as partitioned and dispersed throughout the globe, a kind of anatomization that recalls Adamastor's own physiological, monstrously formed body:

es tambien propio de la gente Mahometana que possee (i posseia màs entonces)
grandissimos miembros de todas las partes del mundo a la sazón descubiertas, no solo
en toda la Africa, i en las dos Asias, sinò que en Europa posseyeron mucho... (541)

Adamastor's limbs stretch to the four corners of the globe in a totalizing gesture that encompasses and touches all points of the *orbis terrarum*. Adamastor's monstrous limbs enable him to act as a diabolic mapmaker since he can insidiously reach the ends of the earth. His body parts throw the spiritual cosmos out of order and emplot the coordinates of sacrilege. In other words, these body parts are a deforming presence across Camonian world-space that obstruct the cosmic harmony that is so dramatically negotiated by the gods and instantiated by imperialist action in every canto of *Os Lusíadas*.

In conclusion, I would like to consider Faria e Sousa's reflection on monstrosity as it relates to his own exegetical enterprise. At the outset of his comments on the Adamastor episode, he writes:

Pondrème aqui a componer una monstruosa nota de monstrosos, para que me tégan por monstro [*sic*] de erudicion? Hagalo quien tuviere essa codicia, que yo con actos vio[l]entos no quiero mostrarme ciente: porque en este lugar basta dezir, que monstro es aquello que en la forma de su genero es desproporcionada, irregular, sin medida, qual el Poeta pintò este Gigante [...]. I este aqui era monstro en mala forma, i en desproporcion... i en prometer sucessos monstruosos, cõ una môstruosa passion vengativa [...]. (535)

The monster and the monstrous may turn the critic himself into a monster, as Faria e Sousa lightheartedly suggests, but in so doing acknowledges an inbuilt reciprocity between monsters and exegesis. Perhaps not a little slyly does Faria e Sousa disavow an overly ambitious erudition as an "acto violento," only then to present a de facto apologia of monsters in the form of his lengthy critical commentary. Adamastor's monstrous self, transformed in Ovidian fashion into the Cape of Good Hope, embodies but one discrete

moment of the dynamic of change and metamorphosis pulsing through *Os Lusíadas* as history, myth, and hermeneutics shape the geographical and ideological *oikumene* of expansion. Faria e Sousa ultimately stands as one of Camões's most influential mythographers since he establishes *Os Lusíadas* itself as a mythos, a decisive, foundational moment in the Iberian cultural archive. The poem, like myth, is a narrative repeatedly told and from which beginnings emanate. The complex hermeneutic dimension of Adamastor is possibly the greatest discovery recorded by Faria e Sousa, the progenitor of a critical tradition that finds in the "monstro horrendo" a source of renewed polemic and controversy on the Portuguese expansionist imagining of Africa.

Notes

¹ For most critics, the Adamastor episode comprises stanzas 37 to 60 of canto V, that is, from the appearance of the cloud out of which Adamastor emerges to his final, anguished cry and his disappearance. For José Benoiel, the episode extends to stanza 70. To my knowledge, Benoiel is the only scholar to argue for an Arabic source for the Adamastor episode, which he finds in the "Conto do Pescador" of the *Thousand and One Nights*.

² Citations of *Os Lusíadas* are from the edition of Emanuel Paulo Ramos.

³ See Cochran, chapters 4 and 5. Cochran's argument, in part, proposes that Camões himself is a figure that "becomes at the same time the bearer of Portuguese culture and paradigmatic for the relationship between culture and state that literary and national history presuppose" (121). Cochran further argues that "the disjuncture between the historical and the figural, between experience and its idealization, come to a head in the looming figure of Adamastor" (139). Additionally, *figura* may be a synonym here for "map," which would support Faria e Sousa's cartographic reading of Adamastor's body (see below). In his study of cartographic literature in early modern Spanish empire, Ricardo Padrón notes that Cortés uses "figura" in reference to territorial representations (93).

⁴ For studies on monsters in the Portuguese context, see Costa, Gil, and Vieira.

⁵ In this third *Década da Ásia*, which certainly served as Camões's source for the lore about Arakan, João de Barros elaborates on the "pouo de Pegú" and what the poet would call the "error nefando": "Porem quanto á maneyra de sua religiam, templos, sacerdótes, grandeza de jdolos & cerimonias de seus sacrificios, vso de comer toda inmundicia, & torpeza de trazer cascaues soldados no instrumento da geraçam....Donde se póde crer ser verdade o que elles contam *que* aquella terra se pouoou do ajuntamêto de hum cam & hũa mulher: pois que no aucto do ajuntamêto delles querem jmitar os cães, por que quem o jmita delle deue proçeder. E a história desta sua geraçam, e que vindo ter á côsta daquelle reyno Pegú que entam eram terras hermas hum junco da China com tormenta se perdeo, de que sómente escapou hũa mulher & hum cam, com o qual ella teue copula de que ouue filhos que depois os ouuerã della, com que a terra se veo a multiplicar, & por nam degenerarem do pay jnuentáram os cascaues....Outros dizem que esta terra & a de Arracam foy pouoáda de degradados, & que o vso dos cascaues foy remédio contra aquella nefando peccado contra natura" (66r).

⁶ Cohen's well-written and persuasive essay is requisite reading for any scholar interested in the interpretation of monsters. One of its many strengths is the applicability of the ideas pre-

sented to a wide range of monsters, both notionally and historically.

⁷ Also see Flasche for comments on Faria e Sousa's scholarly method.

⁸ References to Faria e Sousa's text are by column number.

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