

Introduction

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In his autobiography, Faria e Sousa, arguably the best Camões scholar ever, tells how in his childhood he inherited a book from his grandfather, Estácio de Faria. The book was half-printed, half-manuscript, and the handwritten half of it alternated prose sections with verses. The young Faria was very fond of this book but eventually money spoke louder and he sold it to the son of the abbot who had taught him the humanities. Faria always thought the prose and poems were the work of his ancestor, a poet himself, but when he later read Diogo do Couto's famous passage in *Década viii* where the historian recalls his meeting with Camões and the poet's announcement that he was in the course of writing a book in prose and verse called *Parnaso*, his mind was illuminated and shame fell on him:

Luego que lei esto en Diego de Couto, acordándome de que mi abuelo había tratado con particular amistad a Luis de Camoens en Lisboa y de que el estilo de aquel libro se me parecía tanto al de Luis de Camoens, tuve para mí que era de él el libro y que por su muerte había dado un vuelo de casi siete leguas, que ésta es la distancia que hay desde aquella ciudad a la región de Entre Duero y Miño, adonde él vino a parar. Todas las veces que se me acuerda esto, y que aquel libro que así eché a perder, es posible que fuese el *Parnaso* de *Luis de Camoens* escrito de su mano, me lleno de ira contra mí, y pienso perder el juicio. (134)

This episode illustrates clearly the attitude of its author towards Camões, whom he never failed to call *mi poeta*, an expression to be read literally, since Faria, in spite of his many flaws, has had no rival as a critic. Faria e Sousa's

ardent admiration for his poet goes so far as to posit unashamedly a direct though unlikely genealogy that links Camões and his critic within this private, familiar mythology.

I quote this excerpt and mention Faria's critical rhetoric to contrast his attitude with what is not so much a major trend in Camões scholarship as, above all, the mainstream talk about Camões in general. While the ingenious author of the *Lusitadas Comentadas* insists on considering the author of *Os Lusíadas* his own property, others have bestowed upon Camões and his poetry the fate of being Portugal's property. The difference, of course, lies in the individuality of Faria e Sousa's appropriation as opposed to the idealistic claim that a poem is the expression of a national soul: *my poet* as opposed to *a nation's poet*.

Fortunately, it has been more difficult to steal Camões from this critic than to steal him from the Portuguese. The former is not necessarily a goal in itself (though, again fortunately, it is not up to me to read the minds of all Camões scholars). The latter is most desirable. Hence the importance of a colloquium on post-imperial Camões, in English and in America. It is fitting to recall that, ironically, Faria e Sousa's commentaries were written in Spanish and published in Spain, when Portugal was under Spanish rule. It is not a question of now showing Portugal (or its surrogate, the Portuguese language at its most sublime) to the world, as politicians would say, no matter the ideology they profess, but of allowing Camões to be stolen from the Portuguese. In the title, "post-imperial" is to be read broadly, in the sense that the persons who contributed papers to the colloquium engage in a reflection about the role of Camões's poetry after the demise of the empire, that they do not care about the burden of the empire in Camões scholarship, or simply that the poet belongs to whoever wants to make him his or her own property. This issue of *Portuguese Literary & Cultural Studies* gathers a selection of those papers, read and discussed at the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth on October 11-12, 2002.

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Works Cited

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