

## Lusotropical Romance: Camões, Gilberto Freyre, and the Isle of Love

Anna Klobucka

**Abstract.** Gilberto Freyre's doctrine of Lusotropicalism, arguably the most influential of twentieth-century discourses legitimizing the survival of the Portuguese empire, was rooted to a significant degree in a foundational fantasy of erotic encounter between white explorers and Asian or African women. In this fantasy, regularly reiterated in Freyre's writings, the figure of Camões came to play an increasingly prominent role. The "Isle of Love" episode of *The Lusiads* may be read as an implicit antecedent of Freyre's insistence on amorous underpinnings of the Lusotropical continuum. The narrative sequence of cantos nine and ten, in which sexual coupling between Gama's sailors and the nymphs inhabiting the island is followed by a collective marriage ceremony (and culminates in a prophecy of Portuguese imperial greatness) is shown to reverberate in the unresolved contradiction of Freyre's argument, with its simultaneous endorsement of the colonial contract viewed as a monogamous conjugal union and as polygamous multiplication of procreative opportunity.

The doctrine of Lusotropicalism, formulated by the Brazilian sociologist and anthropologist Gilberto Freyre, was arguably the most influential of twentieth-century discourses buttressing and legitimizing the continuing survival of the Portuguese colonial empire. Its basic premise was first sketched out by Freyre in the early nineteen-thirties, in his groundbreaking account of the formation of the Brazilian society, *Casa Grande e Senzala* (translated into English in 1946 as *The Masters and the Slaves*), where he diagnosed the "singular disposição do português para a colonização híbrida e escravocrata dos

trópicos,” to be explained in large part by “seu passado étnico, ou antes cultural, de povo indefinido entre a Europa e a África” (5). This inherently bicultural and consequently xenophilic spirit of the nation would literally become flesh through the generalized and generally accepted practice of miscegenation, touted by Freyre as the defining aspect of Portuguese colonial expansion and the foundation of its unique historical destiny. The kinder, gentler nature of Portuguese colonialism manifested itself most symptomatically, according to Freyre, through a preponderance of allegedly reciprocal claims of love and desire over unilateral demands of domination and servitude.<sup>1</sup>

Lusotropicalism did not emerge as a comprehensive construct until two decades later, in the aftermath of Freyre’s grand tour throughout Portugal and its overseas colonies, undertaken at the invitation of Salazar’s regime and interpreted in two books Freyre published in 1953, *Um brasileiro em terras portuguesas*, a collection of lectures, and *Aventura e rotina*, a diary of the voyage. Less than a decade later, the Lusotropicalist doctrine received its definitive form with the publication of *O Luso e o Trópico*, a volume whose edition was sponsored by the Portuguese government and which appeared simultaneously in Portuguese, French and English (as *The Portuguese and the Tropics*). Occurring at the time when the European colonial powers were rapidly disinvesting themselves of their overseas possessions, the international dissemination of Freyre’s doctrine was meant to support Portugal’s continuing claim to its colonies by arguing for the profoundly transculturated, to the point of becoming organically hybrid, character of Portuguese presence in “the tropics.”

In Freyre’s ongoing engagement with the problematics of Portuguese expansion throughout the Southern hemisphere, the figure of Camões and the master narrative of his epic poem occupy an increasingly significant role. It needs to be acknowledged, however, that in spite of coming from a lineage of Camões aficionados—as he reports, both his grandfather and his father were able to recite *The Lusiads* from memory almost in its entirety (*Aventura e rotina* 115)—Freyre’s recognition of Camões’s relevance in the context of his own interpretation was slow and rather grudging in coming. It is surprising to note how scarce the references to Camões are in *Aventura e rotina* and *Um brasileiro em terras portuguesas*, particularly if we observe that cultural and literary name dropping is one of recurrent traits of Freyre’s narrative. Commenting on the superior ability to produce visually vivid representations of objects, landscapes, and human and animal figures that he has discerned

in Portuguese writers from the Middle Ages to his own time, Freyre cites, in a single breath, Fernão Lopes, Fernão Mendes Pinto, Gomes Eanes Azurara, Gaspar Correia, João de Barros, Almeida Garrett, Eça de Queirós, Oliveira Martins, Ramalho Ortigão, Fialho de Almeida, Raul Brandão, and Alexandre Herculano—but not Camões, an omission that would be curious under any circumstances, but which becomes glaring in the light of Freyre's later enshrinement of the poet in the Lusotropical pantheon assembled in *O Luso e o Trópico* (*Aventura e rotina* 39). A tentative explanation of this initial resistance to Camões may be extrapolated from a passing comment contrasting the poet's legacy with that of Mendes Pinto, where the latter is said to be a bearer of "valor literário de sentido universal" while the former is described as "prejudicado por excessivo nacionalismo" (*Um brasileiro* 78).<sup>2</sup> In fact, not until Freyre's doctrine becomes largely coopted by the propaganda apparatus of the Estado Novo—not until, with the publication of *O Luso e o Trópico*, it is effectively refashioned into a political instrument of Portuguese nationalism—is Camões granted a prominent place in Freyre's canon of exemplary figures of Lusotropicalism.

Having received an entire chapter to himself in *O Luso e o Trópico*, Camões became also a recurrent feature in Freyre's repertoire of occasional lecture topics, all the way to a curious intervention dating from 1984, in which the sixteenth-century poet appears as a prefiguration of the modern cultural anthropologist (*Camões: Vocação de Antropólogo Moderno?*). Published by the Conselho da Comunidade Portuguesa (an association of Portuguese immigrants) of the state of São Paulo, the lecture had been delivered in the context of the celebrations of the Portuguese national holiday, Dia de Portugal, and its overarching significance is made explicit by the introductory remarks proffered by Freyre's hosts and also reproduced in the brochure: Camões, the greatest poet of the Portuguese language, who gave the Portuguese people "a consciência que temos de nós mesmos como gente e como cultura," is the subject of intellectual reflection by "a autoridade maior na interpretação do mundo que o português criou" (no page numbers). Freyre is thus presented as carrying on Camões's legacy along a metonymic continuum of Portuguese-ness, while the lecture itself establishes a complementary metaphoric analogy based on the disciplinary mission of modern anthropology, which the poet is said to have anticipated.<sup>3</sup> It is in this late reappraisal of Camões and of anthropology, as well as, indirectly, of the aesthetic and ideological ramifications of Lusotropicalism, that Freyre draws the

most explicit link between what he calls “aspectos colectivamente positivos” of eroticism and sexuality “significativamente presentes” in *The Lusiads* and his own sociological endorsement, in *Casa Grande e Senzala*, of polygamous practices of Brazilian slaveholders, those—in the words of Freyre’s lecture—“donjuans de bonitas mulheres afro-negras das senzalas ou agrestemente ameríndias, [que] contribuíram, desde os primeiros tempos da colonização portuguesa do Brasil, para desfibrar antagonismos, quer de classe, quer de raça, entre senhores e escravos, e aproximar esses extremos, ou contrários, antropológicos, através de mestiços, filhos de amores sem barreiras.” To sum up the significance of Freyre’s remarks, in the eighty-four year old anthropologist’s scholarly hindsight, his own account of the formation of the Brazilian society—of which Lusotropicalism was to become a lateral offspring—locates its paradigmatic source in the unrestrained, collective practice of male sexual license, as represented in Camões’s epic. In other words, Lusotropicalism begins on the Isle of Love.

To be sure, Freyre himself never engages directly with the Isle of Love episode of *The Lusiads*; nearly all his references to eroticism and, specifically, to sexual encounters between Portuguese men and African or Asian women in the context of his discussion of Camões are referenced in an oblique fashion, both in the 1984 lecture and in Freyre’s earlier writings; and if any objective correlative of the writer’s recurrent emphasis may be discerned in his comments, that correlative is less Camões the author of *The Lusiads* than Camões the man and his alleged amorous exploits as one of those overseas explorers who acted as “descobridores não só com os olhos, mas com os sexos” (Camões). At the same time, the continuity postulated by Freyre, if it is to be taken at all seriously, makes no sense *except* in the context of the cantos in which Gama’s sailors mate with the nymphs inhabiting an enchanting floating island, whose identification as “willing native girls in a thin mythological disguise” (Quint 119) is as self-evident to a contemporary postcolonial critic as it would have been virtually impossible to articulate for a reader—like Freyre—whose horizon of expectation was informed and circumscribed by the normative canon of traditional Camões scholarship. What matters here is that the sixteenth-century literary fiction of the Isle of Love and the twentieth-century pseudo-scientific doctrine of Lusotropicalism are linked by a steady stream of discourses focused on the articulation of national identity, in which the innate tendency of Portuguese men toward sexual *hybris* emerges as a leading factor in the construction and preservation of the empire, as well

as a significant *moral* justification of Portuguese imperial claims. As Miguel Vale de Almeida has pointed out, Freyre's interpretation of Portuguese culture coincided in a particularly felicitous manner with preexisting (as well as subsequent) representations of national identity, "feitas em Portugal pelas ciências sociais e pela literatura, por discursos oficiais *e pelo senso comum das autorepresentações identitárias*, com espantosa resiliência e adaptabilidade a conjunturas ideológicas e políticas diferentes" (2000, 164; original emphasis). To give but one example, a paradigmatic twentieth-century summary of Portuguese identity (to this day reproduced in mass-market editions), Jorge Dias's 1950 lecture "Os Elementos Fundamentais da Cultura Portuguesa," posits the interrelated triad of "[a] capacidade de adaptação, a simpatia humana e o temperamento amoroso" as "a chave da colonização portuguesa" (53). In this context, the relationship, postulated by Freyre himself, between representations of sexuality in *The Lusiads* and the sexual foundations of Lusotropicalism emerges as anything but arbitrary. Consequently, as I will argue, to review and reconsider what happens in Camões's poem when Gama and his men disembark on the Isle of Love can go a long way toward illuminating the genealogy—understood as both origin and chain of reproduction—of colonial, as well as post-colonial, discourses of Portuguese exceptionalism.

The Isle of Love episode of *The Lusiads* occupies a considerable portion—altogether, 220 stanzas—of the last two cantos of the poem. It is conceived by Venus, protectress of the Portuguese, as a pleasurable interlude in Gama's sailors' weary progress, a haven of "algum deleite, algum descanso ... algum repouso" (IX, 19-20), in which to restore their strength and reward them for their exploits. The island is therefore populated by lovely sea nymphs and Cupid's help is enlisted in order to make these mythical sex workers unambiguously and eagerly responsive to the Portuguese—"pera com mais vontade trabalharem"—as Camões also quite unambiguously puts it (IX, 22). Since even Cupid's arrows may fail to inspire sufficient amorous ardor, a public relations specialist—the goddess Fame—is brought in to reinforce their effect on the nymphs by singing praises of the soon-to-arrive explorers (IX, 45-46). The island itself is depicted as a heavily eroticized *locus amoenus*, which overflows with lasciviously splitting pomegranates and lemons that "cheirando / Estão virgíneas tetas imitando" (IX, 56). Instructed by Venus on how best to stimulate the sailors' lust, the nymphs present themselves to the disembarking Portuguese in a variety of provocative poses—lounging naked in shallow waters, shedding flimsy garments while pretending to flee through the



woods—and a generalized orgy follows readily enough, rendered by the poet in much luscious detail for the benefit of the otherwise excluded reader, since “Milhor é esprimentá-lo que julgá-lo; / mas julgue-o quem não pode esprimentá-lo” (IX, 83). Somewhat abruptly for the thus entranced reader—although quite logically in a broader scheme of things—the focus of the narrative then cuts directly from visions of sexual excess to a collective marriage ceremony: “com palavras formais e estipulantes,” the nymphs become the sailors’ lawful wedded spouses, the couples vowing each other “eterna companhia / Em vida e morte, de honra e alegria” (IX, 84). Afterwards, there is plenty of fine wining, dining and musical entertainment, which segues into a lengthy exposé of future military exploits awaiting the Portuguese in the Orient, always to be followed, for successive generations of heroic conquerors, by a restorative sojourn on the Isle of Love (X, 73). Finally, a second vision of the empire to come, framed by the Ptolemaic model of the universe, is revealed to Gama by his own mythical consort, the sea goddess Tethys.

Many early and not so early commentators of *The Lusiads* sought to explicate the episode in historicist and biographic terms, identifying a number of possible prototypes of Camões’s enchanted island, among them the island of Bombay, also referred to tellingly as “the Island of Good Life” (Ilha da Boa Vida) by its sixteenth-century Portuguese visitors who included the poet himself.<sup>4</sup> Sexual and gastronomical indulgence of Gama’s sailors was therefore claimed to represent actual experiences of Europeans in India. Others, such as Vitor Manuel Aguiar e Silva, castigated those referentially minded readers for their naiveté, insisting on a purely or predominantly allegorical interpretation of the sequence. According to the critic, to insist on identifying geographic and/or biographic sources of the Isle of Love amounts to a “grosseiro erro de teoria literária, que impossibilita depois qualquer exegese aceitável do texto poético em causa,” since the immanent significance of the literary text is unassimilable to an external context of reference (133). In fact, to speak of real islands, real sailors, and real women as somehow meaningfully implicated in the events transpiring on Camões’s mythical island is not merely a fallacy that discredits the interpreter’s disciplinary credentials: it makes proper, that is symbolic, interpretation “radicalmente impossível” (133). The militant tone of the introductory paragraphs of Aguiar e Silva’s essay, with their hyperbolic condemnation of historicist and biographic fallacies at work in traditional criticism of Camões and their manifesto-like imposition of the theoretically necessary distinction between “o funcionamento técnico-semân-

tico do discurso poético” and “o funcionamento técnico-semântico do discurso não-poético,” is explicable largely by the historical context of its original publication in 1972, the glory days of High Structuralism, which, however, had yet to make a dent in the canonical edifice of Camões scholarship. Notwithstanding its dated rhetoric, however, the critic’s central claim—that what happens on the Isle of Love is of entirely allegorical nature and that to postulate any sort of interplay between the fantastic events and the historical reality of Gama’s voyage is at best dangerously naïve—appears to remain well entrenched in the contemporary critical understanding of the episode.

Therefore, while Aguiar e Silva’s objections are of a (dated) theoretical order, their more general implications are anything but. To opt for an exclusively allegorical reading of the episode, while at the same time rejecting the entire dimension of external reference as not only irrelevant but in fact deleterious to the task of interpretation, makes it difficult if not impossible to postulate any kind of meaningful relationship between the events of the last two cantos of Camões’s poem and the historical enterprise of exploration and empire-building carried out by the Portuguese; it effectively severs the Isle of Love sequence from the rest of the poem and splits the episode itself into two poorly fitting halves, representing respectively the (redundant if pleasing) entertainment of the body and the (relevant if plodding) edification of the mind. The severely crippling implications of the either/or interpretive framing recall hermeneutic history of such texts as, most prominently, the *Song of Songs*; however, if profane and religious readings of the biblical poem have indeed been viewed as mutually exclusive, it is because they spring from incompatible contexts of interpretation. It is only if we read *The Lusiads* religiously—not as a sacred text per se, but as a text that sends transcendent messages to the faithful—that we must struggle to accommodate (or bypass, or deny) the direct and literal appeal of its pornographic sequences. It is significant that Gilberto Freyre, who read Camões and other texts and figures of Portuguese overseas expansion from the unique perspective of a Brazilian anthropologist in the process of articulating what Vale de Almeida has referred to as “premature post-colonial discourse” of Lusotropicalism (Almeida 2001), and who explained his early resistance to Camões’s epic by commenting on the poet’s “excessive nationalism” (*Um brasileiro* 78), had no trouble whatsoever integrating sex with symbolism in his own conceptual framework.<sup>5</sup>

Thus, while I take under advisement Aguiar e Silva’s stern warnings against the “mais grave falta” (138) of failing to foreground the symbolic dimension of the episode, I find it difficult to get around the order of priorities accord-

ing to which the travelers' needs are satisfied on the Isle of Love: sex first, food and drink second, sublime prophecy last. I would argue that Voltaire was quite correct indeed in describing the island's atmosphere as resembling that of an Amsterdam *musico*—a kind of musical theater that functioned also as a brothel—and in mistrusting Camões's suddenly virtuous roundabout in stanza 89, with its insistence on the allegorical nature of the episode's physical trappings (228).<sup>6</sup> It is, after all, the poem itself that insists on the *reality* of the nymphs: Veloso's instigation to his companions—"Sigamos estas deusas, e vejamos / Se fantásticas são, se verdadeiras" (IX, 70) can, in the context, be translated pragmatically as "let's see if they are real enough to be screwed." By having sex with the nereids, the sailors prove them real.

It is true, of course, that less than twenty stanzas later the poet declares the island and its captivating inhabitants to be nothing but "as deleitosas / Honras que a vida fazem sublimada" (IX, 89):

Aquelas preminências gloriosas,  
Os triunfos, a fronte coroadas  
De palma e louro, a glória e maravilha:  
Estes são os deleites desta Ilha.

There is, however, an alternative way of reading this disclaimer without, at the same time, accepting what it seems to impose on the reader, a wholesale dismissal of the pagan sexual fantasy as a mere disguise of the true purpose of the poem.<sup>7</sup> It could be claimed that at least in one important sense Camões does establish a causal, metonymic link—rather than a mutually exclusive allegorical opposition—between sexual release and the rewards of a well-lived and virtuous life that are exalted in stanzas 88-91 of the ninth canto. The use that the poet makes of the myth of Acteon—its admonitory function in the context of King Sebastian's excessive preoccupation with hunting, lack of interest in the female sex and consequent failure to produce an heir to the endangered Portuguese throne—have been amply discussed by the critics, beginning with Faria e Sousa in the seventeenth century (Aguiar e Silva 155-62). As Saúl Jiménez-Sandoval argues, Sebastian must therefore be led to understand not only the futility of the hunt for beasts, but also the pleasures and the rewards of the hunt for women that displaces and surpasses Acteon's misdirected pursuit on the Isle of Love (6). As they disembark on the island, Gama's sailors initially expect and hope to be able to pursue and kill



wild animals (“caça agreste”); instead they are presented with a prey that is both gentler and easier to capture (“Caça ... / Tão suave, doméstica e benina”) (IX, 66). What is more, the hunt for the nymphs, the “caça estranha” of Veloso’s exclamation (IX, 69), yields ultimately far greater benefits than any hunt for beasts could have done, since in this episode of *The Lusíads* the satisfaction of physical desires is followed by spiritual fulfillment of the highest, apothotic order. The pedagogical dimension of the episode, in which Sebastian is posited as the implied reader of the distich that sums up the stanzas describing the sexual congress between the sailors and the nymphs—“Milhor é esprimentá-lo que julgá-lo; / mas julgue-o quem não pode esprimentá-lo” (IX, 83) (Jiménez-Sandoval 8)—illuminates from a different angle the relationship between enthusiastic engagement in heterosexual sex and the ample rewards of a virtuous life that Camões expresses in apparently allegorical terms in stanza 89. The “delights of this Isle” are not *either* carnal *or* moral, but rather *both* carnal *and* moral, since realizing carnal desire in the ways exhibited in the episode would be, for Sebastian, the morally correct course of action. Furthermore, such a reading creates a context in which the rather abrupt transition from sex to marriage in stanza 84, however awkward from the point of view of composition, figures as a necessary next step—and one better taken as fast as possible—in the development of the sequence. It is not enough for Sebastian to simply start chasing women, spurned on by the pornographic appeal of the Isle of Love, since it is only through matrimony and the production of legitimate offspring that he can fulfill his royal mission of preserving and extending the Portuguese kingdom.

To tear Sebastian away from the state in which “ninguém ama o que deve, / Senão o que somente mal deseja” (IX, 29) is, however, the overriding priority, and pornographic representation is summoned by Camões to play one of its traditional roles, that of promoting proper sexual development of the young male. In effect, the Isle of Love is designed by Venus and described by the poet as a perfect *pornotopia*, a term proposed in Steven Marcus’s account of sexuality and pornography in mid-nineteenth-century England, *The Other Victorians*: a utopian fantasy in which representation of external reality is relevant only insofar as it sets the stage for and encourages sexual commerce, just as the heavily eroticized descriptions of the lush vegetation covering the Isle of Love prefigure the orgy that is to take place in its midst. It does not come as a surprise that Sir Richard Burton, a naughty Victorian in his own right, who, in addition to his many other literary and existential exploits,

produced several volumes of translations of Asian erotic literature, including the first English version of the *Kama Sutra*, should express his highest appreciation for Camões's skill in crafting the episode. Having declared it "a triumph of genius and art, of tact and taste, of glowing language and of suggestive delicacy," Burton defended his decision to "[render] every line literally" in his translation of the ninth canto of *The Lusiads* by declaring that "only false shame and mock modesty" could give rise to objections formulated on moral grounds (II, 653).<sup>8</sup>

Camões's island differs, however, from more orthodox examples of pornographic fiction in that its delights are not self-enclosed and its finality is not purely, or even primarily, masturbatory (although it certainly has been viewed as such by generations of prurient educators and inquisitive schoolchildren). Indeed, it is not inaccurate to declare that on the Isle of Love Gama's *barões assinalados* "alcançam o apogeu da sua ascensão divinificatória" upon completing "um dos grandes ciclos ... da missão ecuménica do povo português" (Aguilar e Silva 139). It needs to be recognized, however, at the same time, that raw, realistic sex, followed by the exchange of marital vows that can only be taken seriously in "symbolic" terms, followed by the prophetic glorification of Portuguese imperial claims, are strung together in Camões's narrative in a sequence that is neither disarticulated nor arbitrary. Its pedagogical significance, motivated by the desire to preserve the kingdom through educating King Sebastian in the art of "desiring well" and focused on the vertical or temporal continuation of Portugal is but one face of the coin; the other relates to horizontal or spatial propagation of the realm through imperial expansion. As a metaphorically transfigured representation of encounter and its consequences, the Isle of Love may lack the forceful intelligibility that the Adamastor episode has acquired for postcolonial critics; but what it lacks in (relative) transparency, it more than makes up for in its exuberant and equivocal complexity.<sup>9</sup>

*The Lusiads* tells several stories of encounter in two distinct registers: as historical narrative chronicling Gama's fleet's confrontations with actual Africans, Moors, and Indians, and as hallucinatory invention. In the former register, nearly all exchanges, collisions and alliances occur between men, and men only (with one significant exception, to which I will return). No scantily attired native girls promenading on the beach, in the manner of Pero Vaz de Caminha's inaugural account of the Portuguese arrival in Brazil, are to be found in Camões's poem; indeed, the only substantial collective representa-

tion of women on the shore that the poem affords us prior to the fleet's arrival at the Isle of Love is that of the tearful "Mães, Esposas, Irmãs" (IV, 89) who accompany the sailors' departure from the Restelo pier on the outskirts of Lisbon. By contrast, the two enactments of encounter-as-fantasy—the episode of Adamastor and the fleet's sojourn on the Isle of Love—are both stories of sexual desire, of male-female interaction in the liminal and unstable space of the shoreline, and of respectively dystopian and utopian imagined consequences of erotic commerce. Occurring, at the level of plot if not at that of discourse, at the beginning and at the end of Gama's foray into the Indian Ocean, they frame the central account of the poem both structurally and symbolically. The specular relationship between the two episodes has been discussed in some detail in recent studies by Fernando Gil and David Quint, both of which have pointed to its contrastive and compensatory nature: as Quint puts it, "in the symbolic economy of the poem, Adamastor's loss looks very much like da Gama's gain ... the Portuguese get the girls, and consummate fame and power, while the enemy monster is consumed with frustration" (119-20). The two episodes function therefore as intimately interdependent facets of a foundational romance that anticipates and prefigures the centuries-long imperial marriage between the Portuguese and the tropics.

The metaphor of marriage is precisely the figure that structures Gilberto Freyre's differential description of Lusotropical colonization in *O Luso e o Trópico*. While other Europeans contracted "casamentos só de conveniência" with tropical territories and their inhabitants, unions motivated exclusively by economic interest and never by love, the Portuguese, by contrast, espoused the tropics through a unique configuration of "conveniência completada pelo amor" (50). As Freyre hastens to add,

Não tem deixado de haver drama, conflito, dor, angústia, sofrimento em tais encontros. Mas raramente lhes tem faltado amor: amor de homem a mulher de cor e amor de homem a terra quente, para amortecer, dulcificar asperezas, em choques de interesses que a pura conveniência, mesmo quando mútua, dificilmente evita ou sequer amacia, nas relações entre grupos humanos, nisto parecidas com as relações entre indivíduos. (50)

Freyre, of course, did not address directly the political context in which his remarks were being widely publicized by the Salazar regime, but the inescapable implication of his arguments was that it is the Portuguese and the

Portuguese alone who had deserved to avoid the traumatic experience of being forced to divorce their colonial consorts, even as the wave of decolonization kept spreading throughout Asia and Africa. It needs to be noted as well that Freyre's rhetorical insistence on viewing colonial dominance as akin to the institution of monogamous (patriarchal) marriage—be it “completed by love,” as in the Portuguese case, or merely convenient—clashes in his work at large with similarly recurrent articulation of the Lusotropical relationship as a polygamous amplification of procreative opportunity, in which the Portuguese male's “corpo de macho vigoroso” becomes multiplied “em corpos pardos, roxos, amarelos, morenos, no Oriente, nas Áfricas, na América” (*Um brasileiro* 21). This particular unresolved contradiction, while hardly original enough in the context of Western colonial expansion to warrant a search for nationally specific precedents, may indeed be also traced back to *The Lusiads*, thus thickening the web of correspondences between Camões's epic of poetic discovery and Freyre's epic of anthropological consolidation.

Similarly to the marriage between the Portuguese and the tropics, as imagined by Freyre, the hyperbolically positive experience of Gama's sailors on the Isle of Love is also achieved through a confluence of love and convenience, or, more precisely, of sexual fulfillment and contractual guarantee of future material benefits that their conjugal union with the island's inhabitants is expected to bring. Needless to say, the context in which such unproblematic symbiosis is made possible emerges in Camões's epic as an absolute utopia, a tropical *locus amoenus* to Adamastor's also tropical *locus horribilis*. In the fantasy of conquest staged on the Isle of Love, even the greatest loser—Leonardo—gets the girl, and with her an equal share of the spoils (since the nymphs are all *equally* desirable, all *incomparably* beautiful). As a utopian alternative to Adamastor, the Isle of Love does not, however, altogether suppress the signs of what it must exclude in order to salvage the plausibility of its scenario. The trick that Venus, with Cupid's assistance, plays on the nymphs in order to make them willing and eager sexual partners of the Portuguese is explicitly presented as a reenactment of her intervention in the *Aeneid*, where she makes Dido fall in love with Aeneas (IX, 23). The tragic downfall of the betrayed Dido and the curse she utters before her suicide, that dark alternative to Jupiter's prophecy of Roman greatness, are reenacted in *The Lusiads*, as Quint has argued, through the spurned Adamastor's dire prophecy.<sup>10</sup> Dido's reemergence—or, rather, her only explicit emergence in



*The Lusíads*—in the stanzas leading up to the creation of the Isle of Love, as a prototype of intentionally engineered female responsiveness to conquering heroes of the empire, is just as significant. It reinforces the contrastive linkage between the two episodes and it surrounds the island with shadows of its other epic antecedents: the Homeric islands of Circe and Calypso and the island of Lemnos in *Argonautica*, all spaces of amorous encounter between questing navigators and island-bound women. It is through a comparative reading of these cognate narratives that the uniqueness of Camões's Isle of Love truly stands out. *Nothing goes wrong there*, not just for the sailors but also, much more astonishingly, for the women: instead of being left behind on the shore, as mythical tradition mandates, be it to kill themselves, to bear the visitors' offspring or merely to remain forever pining for the fleeting grace of their presence, not only do they become legitimate spouses of the Portuguese; they actually get to sail away with them on their ships. In other words, like in Gilberto Freyre's idealized account of love thriving in servitude and imperial domination springing naturally and innocently from the amorous thrall in which the tropics hold the Portuguese, in the Isle of Love scenario it is possible to keep the cake and eat it too, to reconcile incompatible claims and blend fantasy and history into a smooth flow of poetic narrative.<sup>11</sup> It is presumably in the blank space between the stanza 143 of the tenth canto, where the departure of the sailors and the nymphs from the island is described, and the following stanza 144, where Gama's men return to their Portuguese homeland, that the reader is expected, albeit with no help from the poet, to fall out of allegory and back into history. Otherwise, if we prove too slow or too literal-minded to negotiate the abruptly shifting planes of mythological and historical representation, we become confronted with the potential embarrassment of an imagined encounter between Venus's lovely creatures and the Portuguese spouses of the sailors, whose tearful farewell we had witnessed a few cantos earlier in the poem. Centuries later, this contradiction—unacknowledged yet too prominent to be ignored—resurfaces, in Freyre's writings on Portuguese integration in the tropics, as a similarly equivocal tension between the competing rhetorics of polygamous proliferation of sexual opportunity and monogamous exclusiveness of the marital contract. The fact that in Camões's poem these apparently irreconcilable commitments are contracted within distinct realms of literary representation makes it possible to configure them as materially and ethically compatible, as indeed they were by and large held to be in the historical practice of Western colonial expansion.



Between the wives of the Restelo pier and the wives of the Isle of Love, one other spousal figure stands out in the ample space that *The Lusíads* devotes to narratives of the Portuguese encounter with the tropics. It is significant that the woeful tale of Leonor de Sá, the wife of Manuel de Sepúlveda and his companion in the disaster of shipwreck and their subsequent trek through the “terreno ... duro e irado” (V, 46) of African wilderness, is told by monstrous Adamastor, since they are both “figures of death caused by desire” (Blackmore 22). And if the defeat of Adamastor’s amorous claims is inversely reflected in Gama’s sailors’ sexual conquest of the Isle of Love, so does the fate suffered by Leonor at the hands of “Cafres, ásperos e avaros” who “tira[m] à linda dama seus vestidos” (V, 47) prefigure darkly the strip-teasing maneuvers of the nymphs pretending to flee from their lustful pursuers (Blackmore 131n33). With remarkable economy, the story of hapless Leonor as told by the equally hapless Adamastor points to a double exclusion from the allegedly reciprocal “marriage of love and convenience” between the Portuguese and the tropics, whose utopian projection in the Isle of Love episode reverberates in Freyre’s late imperial doctrine: while sexual claims of African men on white women’s bodies are deemed monstrous to behold, neither do white women—or, more accurately, white Portuguese wives—partake of the erotic paradise that, by the grace of friendly gods, is to forever await Portuguese men who venture below the equator.

If, in the mythosymbolic geography of *The Lusíads*, Adamastor may be said to represent Africa and India stands for itself in the narrative of Gama’s negotiations with the Malabar ruler, the magical, floating Isle of Love emerges as a space yet to be invented, a space of prophecy, foundation of the future (Gil 70). Its unstable coordinates betray marked affinity not only with Freyre’s Lusotropical continuum, but also with such more recent fictional constructs as José Saramago’s “stone raft,” the unmoored Iberian Peninsula whose geopolitical destiny remains to be determined as Saramago’s novel comes to an end, but whose story achieves narrative closure by way of transforming the drifting island into a sort of sexual and procreative utopia. Then there are newer, more unorthodox appropriations, such as the composition on the theme of the Isle of Love, written by Gina Martins, a Portuguese high school student from Tavira, and posted on a web site sponsored by the Universidade Nova de Lisboa. In Martins’s essay, an all-female group of contemporary adolescents, traveling in a time machine, goes on a school trip to Camões’s island; significantly, the only two boys in their class are not allowed

to come along. On the island, the girls are received by a cortege of naked, handsome, muscular—and Portuguese-speaking—male nymphs (“ninfos”); as the author speculates, they are none other than the island’s original visitors who received the gift of immortality and eternal youth from the nereids and who have now taken the place of their mythical consorts in order to offer a proper welcome to the young Portuguese women who arrive at the island. Where Saramago’s *The Stone Raft*, with its floating, amorously charged Peninsula, inscribes its postcolonial version of Camões’s sexual paradise within the confines of the Iberian homeland, Martins’s reenactment of the Isle of Love encounter, albeit quite differently configured owing to its feminist motivation, may likewise be read as a post-imperial reclaiming of national endogamy and therefore, even more clearly than *The Stone Raft*, as a product of the post-Freyrian age in Lusotopian imagination. In any case, if Saramago’s “Peninsula of Love” and Martins’s twenty-first century cyber-counterclaim to the distribution of post-imperial spoils are any indication, sex, fantasy, and historical entitlement are likely to continue to mix in fruitful and unpredictable ways in the space opened up by this notorious episode of *The Lusiads*.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> For a recent, comprehensive reevaluation of the historical relationship between Freyre’s doctrine of Lusotropicalism and the colonial ideology of the Portuguese Estado Novo, see Castelo 1998.

<sup>2</sup> A further comment by Freyre fleshes out the contrastive juxtaposition of the two writers in more elaborate terms and is worth quoting in its entirety: “Críticos autorizados de hoje chegam a considerá-lo [Fernão Mendes Pinto] mais humano e mais universal, pelo interesse que desperta em todos os homens e não apenas nos portugueses, do que o próprio Camões, talvez demasiadamente nacionalista no seu lusismo e demasiadamente político no seu nacionalismo, embora fosse já um lusismo colorido pela sensibilidade ao trópico e pelo amor à mulher escura” (*Um brasileiro* 137). Symptomatically, Camões’s alleged interracial amorous exploits become, for Freyre, the main redeeming feature that can help counterbalance the “excessive nationalism” of the poet’s political discourse.

<sup>3</sup> Freyre’s rambling, in many respects anachronistic, but at the same time fascinating appreciation of Camões the anthropologist would merit a more attentive critical reading than is possible here. Ulla Link-Heer offers such a reading, albeit based on a 1990 French translation by René Goudic, in which Freyre’s text was presented as undated and previously unpublished (“Camões, un anthropologue moderne? Un inédit de Gilberto Freyre,” *Internationale de l’Imaginaire* 14 [1990], 221–61). It is worth noting that the relationship between the introductory remarks by the organizers of the Dia de Portugal festivities and the lecture that those comments frame and qualify extends well into the postcolonial time and space the often less than perfectly harmonious convergence between Freyre’s Lusotropical doctrine and the imperial claims of Salazar’s regime.

<sup>4</sup> A useful although highly argumentative synthesis of the "referential" strain in the critical fortune of the episode may be found in Vítor Manuel Aguiar e Silva's essay "Função e significado do episódio da 'Ilha do Amores' na estrutura de *Os Lusíadas*" (*Camões* 131-33).

<sup>5</sup> In addition to Freyre's extraterritorial, so to speak, relationship with *The Lusíads*, and his consequent immunity to the poem's patriotic appeal, it is also important to take into account, following Vale de Almeida, the observation that the theme of male sexual prowess as a constructive factor of social and genealogical engineering is more commonly present in Brazilian discourses of self-representation than in their Portuguese equivalents (Almeida 2000, 169n6).

<sup>6</sup> "Camoëns, après s'être abandonné sans réserve à la description voluptueuse de cette île, et des plaisirs où les Portugais sont plongés, s'avise d'informer le lecteur que toute cette fiction ne signifie autre chose que le plaisir qu'un honnête homme sent à faire son devoir. Mais il faut avouer qu'une île enchantée dont Vénus est la déesse, et où les nymphes caressent des matelots après un voyage de long cours, ressemble plus à un musico d'Amsterdam qu'à quelque chose d'honnête" (228).

<sup>7</sup> A. Bartlett Giamatti considers at some length the allegorical transmutation of the Isle of Love, along with some of its interpretations by other critics, and concludes that the jarring effect of the poet's reversal of purpose in stanza 89 is characteristic of the "clumsy manner" in which Camões attempts to reconcile pagan and Christian values throughout the poem (224).

<sup>8</sup> Burton's translation of the *Kama Sutra* (with Foster Fitzgerald Arbuthnot) strived to realize the same values of "delicacy and good taste" (*Camoëns* I, 45) that he praised in the erotic sequences of *The Lusíads*. As his biographer comments, "In translating the most explicit libidinal matters, Burton and Arbuthnot adroitly managed to escape the smell of obscenity. Their words were cool and delicate; they used the Hindu terms for the sexual organs, yoni and lingam, throughout" (Brodie 297).

<sup>9</sup> Having asked rhetorically, "What does the figure [of Adamastor] stand for?", Lawrence Lipking offers the following succinct summary: "To twentieth-century readers, the answer has seemed irresistible. Adamastor is the Other; the dark, unconquerable continent; the victims of imperialism; the blacks who already inhabit the land but whom *The Lusíads* barely notices" (217). George Monteiro has described a number of South African literary appropriations of Camões's giant in the chapter "The Adamastor Story" of his book *The Presence of Camões*.

<sup>10</sup> At a more immediate level, Adamastor is of course modeled upon Homer's and Virgil's depictions of the Cyclops Polyphemus. However, Camões drew as well on another literary tradition associated with Polyphemus in the writings of Theocritus, Virgil and Ovid: the giant's unrequited passion for the sea nymph Galatea. It is this latter version of Polyphemus that bears marked affinity with the story of Dido in the *Aeneid*, so much so that "Dido and Polyphemus had achieved a kind of reciprocity—between monstrous passion and passionate monster—in the classical literary tradition that informs Camões' fiction" (Quint 115).

<sup>11</sup> Helder Macedo comments on this aspect of the Isle of Love in pointing out that Camões's concept of love as capable of reconciling all differences "allows him to amplify epic celebration of imperial deeds which, by definition, presuppose the conquest of the other and obliteration of difference, into a qualitatively different celebration of what the epic quest should signify: the triumph of love on Venus's island, where all opposites are reconciled" (59).

## Works Cited

- Aguiar e Silva, Vítor Manuel de. *Camões: Labirintos e Fascínios*. Lisboa: Cotovia, 1994.
- Almeida, Miguel Vale de. "The Brown Atlantic: Pitfalls and Perspectives in Anthropology, Postcolonialism and the Portuguese Case." Colloquium *Race, Culture, Nation: Arguments across the Portuguese-Speaking World*. Watson Institute for International Relations, Brown University. 6 April 2001.

- . *Um Mar da Cor da Terra. Raça, Cultura e Política da Identidade*. Oeiras: Celta, 2000.
- Blackmore, Josiah. *Manifest Perdition: Shipwreck Narrative and the Disruption of Empire*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2002.
- Brodie, Fawn M. *The Devil Drives: A Life of Sir Richard Burton*. New York: Norton, 1967.
- Burton, Richard F. *Camoens: His Life and His Lusiads*. Vols. I-II. London: Bernard Quaritch, 1881.
- Camões, Luís de. *Os Lusíadas*. Ed. organizada por Emanuel Paulo Ramos. Porto: Porto Editora, 1987.
- Castelo, Cláudia. "O modo português de estar no mundo." *O luso-tropicalismo e a ideologia colonial portuguesa (1933-1961)*. Porto: Afrontamento, 1998.
- Dias, Jorge. *Os Elementos Fundamentais da Cultura Portuguesa* (Coleção Essencial). Lisboa: Imprensa Nacional-Casa da Moeda, 1995.
- Freyre, Gilberto. *Aventura e Rotina. Sugestões de uma Viagem à Procura das Constantes Portuguesas de Carácter e Ação*. 1953. 2.<sup>a</sup> edição revista. Rio de Janeiro: José Olympio, 1980.
- . *Um Brasileiro em Terras Portuguesas*. 1953. Lisboa: Livros do Brasil, n.d..
- . *Camões: Vocação de Antropólogo Moderno?* São Paulo: Conselho da Comunidade Portuguesa do Estado de São Paulo, 1984.
- . *O Luso e o Trópico*. Lisboa: Comissão Executiva das Comemorações do V Centenário da Morte do Infante D. Henrique, 1961.
- . *Casa-Grande e Senzala*. 1933. Rio de Janeiro: Record, 1992.
- . *The Portuguese and the Tropics*. Trans. Helen M. D'O. Matthew and F. de Mello Moser. Lisbon: Executive Committee for the Commemoration of the Fifth Centenary of the Death of Prince Henry the Navigator, 1961.
- Giamatti, A. Bartlett. *The Earthly Paradise and the Renaissance Epic*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1966.
- Gil, Fernando. *O efeito-Lusiadas*. Lisboa: João Sá da Costa, 1999.
- Jiménez-Sandoval, Saúl. "Love and Empire in *Os Lusíadas*." Third International Congress of American Portuguese Studies Association, University of Massachusetts Amherst, 8 November 2002.
- Link-Heer, Ulla. "Exotismo e mestiçagem. Gilberto Freyre lê Camões." Trans. Joana Guimarães. *Luso-tropicalismo: uma Teoria Social em Questão*. Org. de Adriano Moreira e José Carlos Venâncio. Lisboa: Vega, 2000. 154-170.
- Lipking, Lawrence. "The Genius of the Shore: Lycidas, Adamastor, and the Poetics of Nationalism." *PMLA* 111.2 (March 1996): 205-221.
- Macedo, Helder. "Love as Knowledge: The Lyric Poetry of Camões." *Portuguese Studies* 14 (1998): 51-64.
- Marcus, Steven. *The Other Victorians*. New York: Basic Books, 1964.
- Martins, Gina. "Ilha dos Amores, 18 de Julho de 2000." <http://educom.fct.unl.pt/proj/por-mars/ilha18.htm>
- Monteiro, George. *The Presence of Camões*. Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 1996.
- Quint, David. *Epic and Empire*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1993.
- Saramago, José. *A Jangada de Pedra*. Lisboa: Caminho, 1986.
- Voltaire. "Essai sur la poésie épique." In *La Henriade*. Paris: Firmin Didot, 1864. 199-253.

Anna Klobucka is Associate Professor of Portuguese at the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth. She is the co-editor of *After the Revolution: Twenty Years of Portuguese Literature 1974-1994* (Bucknell UP, 1997) and the author of *The Portuguese Nun: Formation of a National Myth* (Bucknell, 2000; Portuguese translation forthcoming from Imprensa Nacional–Casa da Moeda). Her articles have appeared in *Colóquio/Letras*, *Luso-Brazilian Review*, *Slavic and East European Journal*, *SubStance*, and *symploke*, among other journals. Among her current projects is a collection of essays (to be co-edited with Mark Sabine) entitled *Embodying Pessoa: Corporeality, Gender, Sexuality*. Email: aklobucka@umassd.edu