

Camões and the English

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1.

On the subject of “Camões in England” there has been much work done prior to *Camões em Inglaterra*, a collection of studies undertaken in a master’s course at the Universidade Nova de Lisboa under the capable direction of Maria Leonor Machado de Sousa, who coordinates the book.¹ Outstanding among those earlier studies are Félix Walter’s *La Littérature Portugaise en Angleterre à l’époque romantique* (Paris: Librairie Ancienne Honoré Champion, 1927); Carlos Estorninho’s “O Culto de Camões em Inglaterra,” *Arquivo de Bibliografia Portuguesa*, nos. 23-24 (Coimbra: Isle, 1961); and Madonna Letzring’s “The Influence of Camões in English Literature,” *Revista Camonianiana*, I-III (1964, 1965, and 1971), pp. 158-180, 27-54, 57-134. To those core studies can now be added *Camões em Inglaterra*.

In the European reception of Camões’s work, Maria Leonor Machado de Sousa reminds us, the English must be granted primacy. (1) Theirs was the first translation of *Os Lusíadas* outside the Iberian peninsula. (2) Theirs is the only case in which a translator is considered to have turned his version of Camões’s epic into a work that as a poem in its own right contributes to English language and culture. (3) England was the first foreign country to recognize that Camões’s lyric poetry was the equal of his epic poetry. (4) An Englishman was the first one to strike a medallion of the poet’s likeness. (5) The first free-standing bio-bibliographic work on Camões was done by the English.

There is a wealth of information in this collection of studies that take new and fresh looks at tried and tested topics such as the translations of *Os Lusíadas*, beginning with Richard Fanshawe’s in 1655 and proceeding through, among others, William Julius Mickle’s in 1776, J. J. Aubertin’s in 1878, and Richard Francis Burton’s in 1880, with a final nod at the American Leonard Bacon’s in 1950 and William C. Atkinson’s (in prose) in 1952. Complementing those studies of the translations of Camões’s epic are detailed studies of the nature and quality of the so-called *lírica*. There are noble attempts at seeing from within what translators of various stripe attempted to do as they “Englished” Camões, at once faithful to their visions of what the translation of poetry entailed and permitted and yet differing so

radically from one another. Utilizing current notions and theories on translation, the students of the various versions of Camões's work examine closely the versions of the epic by Fanshawe, Mickle, and Burton, and of the lyrical poetry by Strangford. Shortcomings and downright errors are not slighted in the commentary, but they are not gloried in either. Rather the emphasis is on explaining thoughtfully the many expansions, substitutions, and seemingly idiosyncratic choices of word and image.

Besides the individual essays devoted to Mickle's version of *Os Lusíadas*, Strangford's translations of the shorter poetry, John Adamson's much undervalued contributions to the study of Camões, and Richard Francis Burton as a passionate *camonista*, there is an essay on English encomia on Camões (especially in poetry), along with useful essay-lists of the English translations of *Os Lusíadas* and of the lyrics through the nineteenth century. A quick count confirms that "Alma minha gentil" was the shorter poem most often selected by English translators, a choice that, as my own study shows, continues through the twentieth century.

The one great fact about Camões in England, as this collection confirms in several places, is that Camões's reputation in England was founded on two misconceptions. First, the English accepted unquestioningly (despite the existence of Fanshawe's quite different view in his translation) Mickle's conception of *Os Lusíadas* as the epic of commerce. Setting aside Camões's own conception of his poem as a celebration of the history of the Portuguese people, this eighteenth-century employee of the East India Company beefed up the heroic role of Vasco da Gama until he became the center of the poem, thereby turning the poem, by addition and expansion (preceded by a long apologetic and explanatory essay), into a glorification of imperial expansion through commerce. It was Mickle's version of Camões's poem, incidentally, that was praised by the American whose own epic of commerce and democracy he entitled *The Whale* (in England) and *Moby-Dick, or The Whale* (in America), evoking at one fell swoop both leviathans, the scriptural one and the English Hobbesian one.

Herman Melville was also influenced by the second largely misconstrued Camões, the poet whose life was read out of his lyrical poetry, first by Lord Strangford and then by John Adamson. This Camões was served piping hot to the English romantics. Ill-fated in love and unappreciated by his country, this Camões was the author of lyrics that spoke emotionally to William Lisle Bowles, Lord Byron, Robert and (above all) Elizabeth Barrett Browning.

Camões em Inglaterra offers us fundamental scholarship of a kind that has become increasingly rare in recent decades. These studies are the unpretentious fruit of the earnest search for solid facts and meaningful details. It is refreshing to see, moreover, that these young scholars, rather than dismissing disdainfully or (worse) ignoring the work that has preceded theirs (done no matter how long ago), have chosen to incorporate the fruits of the labors of their elders and to build on them.

2.

In an essay on the books that might have been in Robinson Crusoe's library, Alberto Manguel identifies "several Portuguese books" that Robinson Crusoe recovers from the ship-wreck. "No doubt a copy of Camões's *Lusiads*, a fitting book in a ship's library," he ventures; "perhaps the writings of the illustrious António Vieira, including the wonderful 'Sermon of Saint Anthony to the Fishes,' in which Crusoe might have read a defense of the brothers of Friday; most certainly the *Peregrination* of Fernão Mendes Pinto, which tells of strange voyages through the still-mysterious Orient and which Crusoe's author, the omnivorous Defoe, knew well."²

In *As Fontes Portuguesas de Robinson Crusoe*, Fernanda Durão Ferreira has a longer list of the Portuguese works in Robinson Crusoe's island library.³ Although António Vieira does not figure in her research, she concludes that Crusoe's Portuguese books are *Os Lusíadas*, *A Peregrinação*, Duarte Pacheco Pereira's *O Esmeraldo de Situ Orbis*, João de Barros' *Décadas da Ásia*, Fernão Lopes de Castanheda's *Descoberta e História da Conquista da Índia*, Gaspar Correia's *Lendas da Índia*, Gomes Eanes de Zurara's *Crónica da Conquista da Guiné*, and Valentim Fernandes' *O Manuscrito*.

The task that Fernanda Durão Ferreira has set for herself is to establish connections between Defoe's early eighteenth-century novel and its Portuguese precursors by searching out parallels in incident and character, echoes of words, and duplication of phrases. Her thesis is: "Para delinear Robinson (o personagem principal) Daniel Defoe inspirou-se na figura de um homem que viveu solitariamente muitos anos na ilha de Santa Helena e cuja história é descrita por João de Barros, Fernão Lopes de Castanheda e Gaspar Correia. Para além disto, no desenrolar da obra irão surgindo episódios semelhantes a outros que muito bem conhecemos de 'Os Lusíadas', de 'A Peregrinação', de *Esmeraldo de Situ Orbis*, Gomes Eanes de Zurara e Valentim Fernandes." If some of the evidence is not by itself persuasive, in the aggregate her evidence

points to Defoe's direct and (to us) brazen appropriation of the received texts of Portugal's great maritime literature.

Of particular interest to student of Camões are the parallels the author finds between incidents in Robinson Crusoe and two episodes of *Os Lusíadas*. The episode of the "Velho do Restelo" is posited as the source for Crusoe's conversations with both his father and his friend's father before embarking on his sea voyage. Turning to Crusoe's return to England and his decision to go by land this time, the author discovers echoes and coincidentals in the episode in Canto VI of "O Magriço."

After marshalling the evidence to establish Defoe's debts in Robinson Crusoe to at least eight different Portuguese texts, the author reconfigures Robinson Crusoe as something other than an "English" hero. He becomes a hero of Portuguese maritime literature.

Um heroi cujo verdadeiro nome é Fernão Lopes;
 Que é filho do Velho do Restelo;
 Que viaja da Guiné para o Brasil num barco português;
 Que vive em S. Salvador da Bahia e fala a língua local;
 Que durante uma viagem para a Costa Africana, naufraga na
 Ilha de S.ta Helena;
 Que depois de chegar a Inglaterra volta a fazer-se ao mar
 com destino a Lisboa, onde procura o capitão português
 do barco onde viajara para o Brasil;
 Que parte de Lisboa para Inglaterra por terra, como o
 Magriço;
 Que, como o Magriço, atravessa todas as terras que aquele
 heroi percorreu, indo socorrer as damas indefesas,
 Dificilmente se pode considerar um herói inglês.

As Fernanda Durão Ferreira rightly points out, in Defoe's time he had access to *The Lusiad, or, Portugals Historicall Poem*, Sir Richard Fanshawe's English translation of *Os Lusíadas* published in 1655. But a comparison of the passages from Defoe Fernanda Durão Ferreira proposes as having been influenced by Camões with Fanshawe's text indicates that Fanshawe was not Defoe's source, at least not for specific language. One might thus infer that either Defoe had access to *Os Lusíadas* in translation into some language other than English or he knew Portuguese well enough to read Camões in the original.

In any case, the name of Daniel Defoe can now be included among those numerous English writers influenced by the classics of Portuguese literature.

Notes

¹ *Camões em Inglaterra*. Coordinated by Maria Leonor Machado de Sousa. Lisbon: Ministério da Educação/ Instituto de Cultura e Língua Portuguesa, 1992.

² Alberto Manguel, "The Library of Robinson Crusoe," *American Scholar* (Winter 2001), pp. 61-62.

³ Fernanda Durão Ferreira, *As fontes portuguesas de Robinson Crusoe*. Lisbon: Fim de Século, 1996.