

## The Poetics of *Imitatio* in Camões

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L uiz Vaz de Camões, born circa 1524, was educated at Coimbra University (transplanted from Lisbon in 1537) at a time when humanism was flourishing in Portugal. This efflorescence was in part a belated reaction to historical and cultural forces which had long since swept through Italy, France and other European countries. Ernst Curtius refers to Claudio Sánchez-Albornoz's essay 'España y Francia en la edad media' (1923), which provides reasons for Spain's cultural belatedness that apply equally well to Portugal (541). Visigothic and Gothic Spain inherited the machinery of Roman governance, and so maintained a continuity with the past not possible in the Merovingian kingdom, which developed new forms of governance that led to feudalism. Gothic Spain was not as adept at governance as its Visigothic predecessor and was in a state of crisis when the Arabs invaded. In the course of the reconquest, towns, strongholds and monasteries were established in the highlands north of the Douro. Feudalism was not able to develop here. There was no working population, no distinction in power between a military caste and a peasantry; rather there were groups of families who joined together to create land syndicates in which all the people played a decisive role.

Spain, as Curtius puts it, 'dropped into the rear-guard', which does not mean it was backward (542), but it would have been less aware of the ontological distinction between past and present inaugurated by Petrarch's vision (to be considered below); or at least not as swept away by it, more secure in its sense of continuity with the past. Curtius offers as an example

of the type of work to emerge from this ethos the *Visión delectable* of Alfonso de la Torre, who compiled the book in 1440 and published it in 1480, and yet ‘practically ignores all that European literature, science and philosophy have produced since 1200’ (542). His masters of rhetoric include the late antique writer Sidonius Apollinaris, and, most importantly, Virgil. We see from this example, then, that cultural belatedness does not mean a blindness to classicism, but rather implies an older stratum of continuity; a continuity, indeed, which might give strength to the impulses of renaissance which are eventually to reach Iberia under the influence of such figures as the Petrarchist Garcilaso de la Vega in the sixteenth century.

Enrichment through world trade, too, opened up the previously impoverished and embattled Iberian peninsula to European cultural influences. Certainly the new learning, spurred by the initiatives of King João, took hold in Portugal subsequent to the discovery of the Cape sea route to India at the close of the fifteenth century. Thus André de Resende, a confirmed Erasmian, could address the university community in Lisbon at the beginning of the 1534 academic year in a way that was militantly representative of Erasmus’s teachings – although this fact must also point to an entrenched establishment opposition (Hirsch 166). He – in true humanist vein – on the one hand lauded Socrates for his practical ethics, and Cicero for an ethics acceptable to and serviceable for both Christians and pagans. On the other hand he criticised the cultural backwardness of Portugal while making sure to single out for praise figures with solid humanist credentials: the classical linguist, Miguel da Silva; the jurist, Gonçalo Vaz Pinto; the mathematician, Francisco de Melo; and the grammarians, Estêvão Cavaleiro and Pedro Rombo (169). Deeply interested in the history of Portugal, Resende also wrote poetry in a humanist strain, based on classical myth.

We do not know for certain when Camões attended university, though it must have been after 1537, as he was said to have studied at Coimbra, which was only opened in that year.<sup>1</sup> Although Erasmus died in 1536, the enlightened humanist strain at Coimbra flourished for at least the next thirteen

years, during the time when Camões would certainly have been a student. It seems unlikely, judging from the mythical and historical content of his great epic, *Os Lusíadas*, that Camões would not have been stirred by Resende's example, though there were certainly other figures for him to emulate, as we will see.

The liberalism Resende encouraged, though, overreached itself. In 1546 King João appointed a group of radical humanists from the College of Guyenne in Bordeaux. The group soon fell out of favour, and was prosecuted for heresy by a High Tribunal in 1550. Elisabeth Feist Hirsch, in her biography of Damião de Gois, points out that the conservative humanists outnumbered the others. Renowned Portuguese historian de Gois, a personal friend of Erasmus, was a wandering internationalist who had eventually returned to Portugal for good, but had so fallen out of favour (thanks to the conservative faction) that some of his writings had been placed on the Inquisition Index of undesirable texts (Welch 304). Even the conservatives, however, had a strong interest in classical learning. Thus a figure such as António Pinheiro, the bishop of Miranda, could translate Pliny the Younger's *Panegyric of Trajan* into Portuguese for instructional purposes, while Jeronymo Osório, bishop of Silves, admired Plato and Cicero (Hirsch 181–83). Sidney Welch (to draw on a piece of tenuous lore which would underline Pinheiro's credentials as a humanist – or perhaps not, considering the outcome) feels that Camões may have decided not to sail to the east in 1550 (his name was down to embark in that year with the new viceroy of India, Afonso de Noronha) because of the possibility of patronage from Pinheiro. This fact was adduced by, in Welch's words, 'early commentators' of Camões from a cryptic allusion in Sonnet 190, where the poet apostrophises a pine tree (*pinheiro* in Portuguese). Certainly Pinheiro was encouraging to 'men of culture', but, if there is any truth in the story, Camões' hopes were to prove futile (Welch 446).

Not mentioned by Hirsch, but noted by Roy Campbell in the essay on Portuguese poetry in his book *Portugal* (1957), was the arrival in Spain in

1526 of Sá de Miranda from Italy, who brought with him knowledge of Italian poetic forms such as the *terza rima* and sonnet, and who inspired a Pleiad comprising writers of bucolic verse (133). Campbell writes that if the Miranda Pleiad knew of Camões, they said nothing of him. Though Camões, in turn, never mentioned them, this is of course not to underestimate the effect of the general Italian influence in Iberia.

Indeed, the presence of Petrarch, especially, looms large in a figure mentioned above, whom we find neither in Campbell nor in Hirsch, the Spanish poet Garcilaso de la Vega (c.1501–36). His influence was considerable. Ignacio Navarrete writes that during his lifetime Garcilaso was revered as ‘the only national poet worthy of imitation’ (21). Garcilaso was considered as a rival to his long dead Italian master. Interestingly enough, if one considers the similar social and historical forces surrounding Camões, Garcilaso was ‘an aristocratic hero who had succeeded in combining the practice of literature with military glory’ (Navarrete 21). Ercilla borrowed his key expression in this regard, ‘now the pen in my hand, now the sword’ (Cruz, ‘Letters’ 190), as, let us not forget, did Camões.

Garcilaso wrote a sonnet, ‘En tanto que de rosa y de açucena’, based in part – that part which is to do with the lover’s golden hair being dishevelled by the breeze (Garcilaso, *Works* 15–16) – on Petrarch’s *Canzoniere* 90, which we will examine below in relation to successful *imitatio*. It is useful to consider this sonnet as a practical example of the type of work done by the poet. James Nicolopoulos in *The Poetics of Empire in the Indies* calls it a ‘far more ambitiously necromantic imitation’ (57) than Petrarch’s; meaning by ‘necromantic’ – Thomas Greene’s term (*The Light in Troy* 37) – that (as is true of Petrarch’s sonnet) it is successful in its integration of subtext and contemporary pressures and concerns, to the point where the imitation takes on its own life. What makes it ‘ambitious’ in Nicolopoulos’s eyes (rather a dubious qualification in my view) is its heightened eclecticism. That is, the sonnet engages not only with Virgil but also with the Italian contemporaries Pietro Bembo and Bernardo Tasso, who both wrote sonnets recalling and

transforming the image of Laura with her hair lifted by the breeze. Garcilaso, then, seems to challenge the Italians and at the same time resuscitate Virgil, as he alludes specifically to the Virgilian subtext underlying Petrarch. The Spanish poet's purpose, Nicolopulos feels, is to counter the awe associated with Petrarch, and relegate him to the status of a predecessor whose own approach and sources can be used to create something new and different (58). Indeed, as Anne J. Cruz points out, Garcilaso consciously resisted a single-minded adherence to Petrarchan convention (Cruz, 'Spanish Petrarchism' 86).

The sense of rivalry with other writers and the use of a powerful father figure for one's own purposes should be noted here in relation to Camões, who would engage with classical writers in similar fashion. Camões, through the very act of writing his epic, might have been interacting with Garcilaso himself, for the Spanish poet, though an incomparable lyricist, died before he could write an epic, the appropriate and crowning poetic work for a poet in the Spanish-Habsburg Empire of the time, an empire which covered more of the world than the Roman one, and, according to the contemporary historian López de Gómara, with greater glory attached to it because of its discovery of the New World (Nicolopulos 60). Ercilla, in Nicolopulos' view, certainly saw the breach caused by Garcilaso's early death, and tried to fill it with his *La Araucana*, the first part of which was published three years before *Os Lusíadas*. Camões, who had been working on his poem for too long a period of time to be very pleased by thus being overtaken by a Spaniard in the last leg of the race – because of an unavoidable delay in Moçambique (Welch 118) –, would in the end have been doubly spurred by an aesthetic rivalry with Garcilaso's fame and with Ercilla's nationalist presumption. Portugal could surely (with some justice) have contested Spanish supremacy based on territorial extent, and a poet of Camões' temperament would want to express the fact in no uncertain terms. Indeed, the scale of the action in *La Araucana*, which tells of a mere local uprising in the New World, could not begin to compete with Camões' truly epic

scale, despite Ercilla's subsequent extension of his poem (written in response to Camões, as Nicolopulos convincingly argues).

Most recently the practice of *imitatio* in the Renaissance has been dealt with thoroughly by Nicolopulos, who examines specifically Camões and Ercilla in relation to the practice. Because of his work it is not necessary to go over the same ground in detail again. It is enough to know that there are various categories of *imitatio*, but the distinctions among them are of little significance to the present essay, barring in one fundamental area. It is, following Seneca and Petrarch, necessary to underline the difference between superficial *imitatio* and substantial *imitatio* (Greene, *The Light in Troy* 75). In the case of the latter the spirit of earlier texts and passages (as opposed to the mere letter) has been absorbed and reproduced in a powerful new work. Nicolopulos relies fairly intensively on the most astute book on this subject, Thomas Greene's *The Light in Troy*, as I do below. But whereas Nicolopulos uses Greene to clarify matters of classification, I feel Greene's close readings of passages from Petrarch are *loci classici* in the field of *imitatio* criticism, and it would be useful to look at instances from his book both in order to appreciate what the critic can extricate from certain materials, and to provide a model against which to measure an example from Camões.

Greene compares a failed passage of *imitatio* by Petrarch (which, considering its richness, is not the same as a superficial one) with ensuing successful examples. The failed passage is Petrarch's famous account of his climbing Mont Ventoux in Provence, based, as if it were a precursor in miniature of the conflation of discovery and classicism in Camões, on a classical source and an 'existential impulse' (*The Light in Troy* 104). The classical source is a passage in Livy, where Philip of Macedon climbs Mount Haemus in Thessaly in order to test the old belief that one could view two seas from the top, the Black and the Adriatic. Greene feels that Philip's excursion, plagued by obscuring mist, was hardly worth Petrarch's while as a model. The existential impulses prompting Petrarch's ascent, however, were credible enough, and included the force of his sensibility, his desire to

give focus to his inherent restlessness, his desire to set himself within the frame of history, and, as Greene puts it, his 'will to dominate with his romantic imperial egoism' the 'widest extension of space' (107). This last motive is, again, of interest in relation to Camões, as it ties in directly with the sense of nationalist pride which he associates with Portuguese imperial expansionism in the first canto of *Os Lusíadas*.

Is this to say that Camões finds a precursor in Petrarch? Hardly. What is at issue is the historical awareness exemplified in Petrarch (barely discerned in the post-imperial world until his moment), who was able to distinguish, with however much anxiety, the ontological difference between past and present mentioned at the beginning of this essay. The point is, intriguingly, better made when we consider an example of successful *imitatio* below, which has to do with the exploration of the inner man rather than the domination of external space. Where, though, does Petrarch 'fail' in the present instance? At a crucial moment he turns to allegory, through which his mountain becomes the supreme point that is the end of life, while he, the archetypal traveller through life, strives against his weaker nature to come into the presence of divinity. The problem here is that he is caught between Christian *allegoresis*, an increasingly tenuous literary force, and inspirational flashes of an incipient humanist understanding; thus caught he conveys an ultimate sense of weak indeterminacy. That he rebukes himself with Augustine's words about the vanity of worldly pursuits (*The Light in Troy* 108), gives point, it seems to me, to the passage from Livy he chose as his basis of *imitatio*. But even if Petrarch had a more conscious control over his materials than is conceded in this case by Greene, one must agree that the poet dramatizes in this whole passage the fact that historical awareness 'did not provide an instrument powerful enough to cope with antihistorical inertia'. What results is a 'crisis of retrospection', in that Petrarch's retrospective picture of the event 'too simplistically' portrays historical passage as error; his depiction of moral collapse reveals a failure to deal comprehensively (that is, in a way which takes into account historical

awareness and the classical source) with the given signs of the moment, because of which 'no enrichment of the moral style can derive' an enrichment inherent in the proper contemporary deployment of classical materials (111). Retrospection in this case, then, involves a kind of backtracking into medievalism which manifests a failure of nerve in a writer brimming with humanist impulses.

Successful *imitatio* is apparent in the case of Petrarch's famous *Canzoniere* 90:

*Erano i capei d'oro a l'aura sparsi  
che'n mille dolci nodi gli avvolgea,  
e'l vago lume oltre misura ardea  
de quei begli occhi ch'or ne son si scarsi;                   4  
e'l viso di pietosi color farsi,  
non so se vero o falso, mi pareva:  
i'che l'esca amorosa al petto avea,  
qual meraviglia se di subito arsi?                       8  
Non era l'andar suo cosa mortale  
ma d'angelica forma, e le parole  
sonavan altro che pur voce umana;                       12  
uno spirito celeste, un vivo sole  
fu quel ch'i'vidi; e se non fosse or tale,  
piaga per allentar d'arco non sana.*

Her golden hair was loosed to the breeze,  
sweetly curled a thousand times,  
and endless light burned in her eyes,  
where now it's scarce; it seemed to me                   4  
(right or wrong? true or false?)  
her face was touched with tints of pity:  
the heat so smouldering in my breast,



consequences, and this is precisely what the poem does. That this is no easy achievement is highlighted by the fact that the Virgilian lines which link Laura to the past transform her into the living embodiment of the antiquity that was so dear to Petrarch's heart. Of course, she has now taken her place among the classic pantheon, and the image of the bow joins both Venus as huntress and Cupid to the figure of Laura, to make good this apotheosis. The vision, thus enlarged, is as if of a view into antiquity itself, and so is radically retrospective. What is not retrospective is its effect on the speaker, to reveal an old 'wound'; the wound of love still felt. Though he does not comment on it, this continuing pain would be for Greene all to the point in terms of a disparity between past and present in Petrarch. For Greene sees a difference between the surface text and the subtext based on the presentation of the 'epiphanies' in both passages; he does not see Laura simply merging into the pantheon. That is, where the *Aeneid* portrays Aeneas' 'progressive recognition of divine radiance', the sonnet subjects the poet's sense of the divinity of his subject to 'doubts', 'qualifications', and the 'insecurities' of a sensibility which is 'struggling to validate' its own vision (*The Light in Troy* 113). In other words, Greene emphasises the role of the poet as subjective centre of the poem, and the effects of his subjectivity on the matter of the poem. Thus, Greene can observe a 'repeated betrayal of representation' which is a type of 'fall' often found in Petrarchan imitation, as we will see shortly. The classical subtext, on the other hand, 'seems proof against such betrayals'.

Of course, the Petrarchan insecurity is what adds interest to the poet's use of *imitatio*, stamps it with his own particular qualities, gives it value in its own right. Greene notes the diminishment of representational strength in the sonnet in the following terms. The 'vivid details' of the opening lines are displaced by 'psychologistic process', illustrated in the shift from a verb 'of almost pure description' (*avolgea*, 'turned', line 2), to a more 'impressionistic one' (*ardea*, 'burned', line 3), to one which 'shows the speaker's bias' (*parea*, 'it seemed', line 6). The process is also illustrated in

the 'confession of phenomenological uncertainty' (*no so se vero o falso*, 'I don't know whether truly or falsely', line 6); in the stock pun *l'aura* (line 1), subversive of 'pure representation'; in the confession of a 'tendency to enchantment' (*i'che l'esca amorosa al petto avea*, 'I who had the tinder of love in my breast', line 7). We also find a contradiction between 'superhumanity' and 'vulnerability to time' in lines 9–12; a 'semiretraction' in line 13; and an 'implicit restoration of truth' to a 'frankly subjective realm' in the final line.

To see the betrayal of representation as a 'fall' is not to belittle it, as what happens through it is a 'version of history', where the 'construct or fiction of cultural process' that the distinction between subtext and modern text encapsulates 'extends' from the one to the other (115). The important point is, however, that creativity is not deflected from its course because of this. The reader distinguishes between the surface text and the subtext and notes the differences between their 'presentational modes', thereby avoiding the 'trap of anachronism'. The practice of *imitatio* enables the emergence of such cultivated work along with the historical perceptions associated with it.

*Imitatio* is a principal tool of Camonian poetics, involving classical allusions of varying types and in varying relations, as discussed by both Greene and Nicolopoulos. In *Os Lusíadas* (from now on referred to by its English title, *The Lusíads*) there are 1102 stanzas, comprising 8816 lines. Looking at Leonard Bacon's commentary (which is indebted to Richard Burton's and J.D.M. Ford's commentaries), one finds 690 classical allusions, meaning that there is on average one allusion for every 13 lines, or, roughly, an average of one allusion per every one and a half stanzas. I want to dwell on one such case in particular, a case that draws on the *Aeneid* and which thus has a more general resonance in the epic, as Virgil is a principal Camonian source, used by him a hundred times in *The Lusíads*. The passage of interest to me in this essay is Canto II, stanzas 111–13, where the King of Malindi welcomes the Portuguese. Bacon lists 7 references for these stanzas (Camões

77–78), but if we trace all the possible sources of the mythical materials alone, as given by Robert Graves, we find that the number of allusions increases to 24 (Graves 1: 37, 132, 165–66, 172, 231). At such a rate of increase one might treble Bacon's grand total, to reach a figure closer to 2070, or nearly 2 classical allusions per stanza. Not all these references constitute examples of what might be thought of as *imitatio*. In the epic as a whole we find brief references and extended passages. The former comprise literary, historical, geographical, mythological and cosmological points of interest, or instances of *eruditio*, to use a contemporary term; the extended passages involve the modelling, copying, paraphrasing and rhetorical patterning of two or more lines from mainly literary texts. These I term cases of *imitatio*. There are 73 such passages in the epic, at least if one doesn't excavate the strata of each for other traces, in a Gravesian manner.

Whatever variations there may or may not be in the statistics, the point remains that classical sources were very important in the composition of *The Lusíads*. In examining Camões' use of *imitatio* in giving a voice to the King of Malindi (Malindi being the last point of call on the East African coast prior to sailing to India), it is useful to understand what was at stake in the practice of *imitatio*. To see *imitatio* as based simply on a wilfully turned blind eye to all that is local and non-European is to misunderstand an important aspect of the way that creativity worked in the Renaissance. Each alien allusion uttered by the King of Malindi involves a transfer from Europe to Africa not of mindlessly available material, but (as we see in the case of Petrarch and Virgil above) of powerful tropes creatively displayed in a context which transcends any one particular culture – involving not only Portugal and Malindi but also the ancient classical source cultures along with the writings of contemporary poets who drew on these works. Again, as we have seen above, the success of this deployment of materials was by no means a given. It required a minute knowledge of numerous works; of their implications, their characteristic features, their textual histories; all of which required in turn an aesthetic commitment (to say nothing of

facility) on which the quality of the present verse and so the reputation of the author depended.

Greene in his more recent *The Vulnerable Text*, in pondering his materials in a manner continuous with his approach in *The Light in Troy*, refers to the ability of certain authors to reinvent pre-existing symbols, and thus reanimate them, despite all the problems involved in doing so. Though a culture provides the text with arbitrary symbols and metaphors that are themselves undermined by scepticism, erosion, tired convention and biased manipulation, it would be reductive to refer to this vocabulary as 'inert *doxa*, lifeless opinion, [and] sterile received ideas'. The literary text worthy of our concern reinvents this vocabulary, making it again 'potent' and 'productive', as in the case of Petrarch's *Canzoniere* 90. While all texts are vulnerable to the eroding and debasing forces recently mentioned, the text worth studying will not succumb. But the pressures of these forces are particularly apparent in a culture whose notion of originality has more to do with origins than novelty. Thus, the Renaissance text's dependence on secondhand signifiers is the source of a vulnerability that is aggravated by the fact that its culture, as Greene puts it, 'does not yet fetishize originality'. The text that can reinvent its secondhand signifiers exhibits the power to reveal, say, the density of these signifiers, along with 'the sedimented substance of a tradition that does not merely erode or debase' (*The Vulnerable Text* xii).

It seems to me that Camões, in his transference of his culture's textual sources and practices to an African setting, *is* exploiting an element of originality as novelty, but not for its own sake, rather for the sake of uncovering the sedimented substance of a tradition, and so giving new life to it, life that is indeed not unrelated to the contemporary historical moment that he depicts. As already stated, if we consider the allusions present in the King of Malindi's words we find a wealth of references: there are at least twenty possible source texts in three stanzas, involving such authors as Apollodorus, Diodorus Siculus, Euripides, Horace, Hyginus, Pausanias, Plutarch, Seneca, Strabo, and Virgil. But apart from this general density of *eruditio*, a very interesting act of *imitatio* occurs in stanza 111:

And as the time seems ripe, why even so  
Is my desire to hear what you relate,  
For who is he, by fame, who doth not know  
That actions of the Portuguese are great?  
Nor so far distant from us flames the glow  
Of the clear sun that you should justly rate  
Our rough Melindian hearts as apt to treat  
Below its worth so marvellous a feat.

The passage is modelled on Dido's reply to Ilioneus, from Virgil's *Aeneid*, I 565–68:

Who has not heard the story of your woes,  
The name and fortune of your native place,  
The fame and valour of the Phrygian race?  
We Tyrians are not so devoid of sense,  
Nor so remote from Phoebus' influence.

One might respond disparagingly enough to this and the section which follows, by asking if the King of Malindi knew his Virgil, and by seeing in its assumption that the whole world was privy to a classical education an ethnocentric strategy, similar to that allegedly present in Sir William Jones's *Hindoo Hymns*, which, according to Nigel Leask, are 'mediated by the poetic vehicle of the Pindaric or Miltonic Ode'. Such strategies, says Leask, drawing on Johannes Fabian, can be construed as 'the denial of coevalness' to non-European cultures (177). In the stanzas prior to this passage, Camões does indeed show overt prejudice enough, in making the King share, in unlikely fashion, da Gama's anti-Muslim feelings. I want to argue, however, that a distinction can be made within these stanzas where prejudice and praise are interwoven, a distinction which turns on *imitatio*. For *imitatio* is an ambiguous practice, which might be the vehicle of both negative and

positive approaches. As the vehicle of prejudice it is vulnerable to being exploited for crude, nationalist purposes. But, as the vehicle of praise, it might reveal a high regard for its subject. The interweaving of negative and positive qualities tells of a general ambivalence in Camões which lies at the heart of the epic, where the proud imperialist of certain stanzas becomes the outspoken critic of imperialism in others. The close proximity of these qualities makes it impossible to demystify the epic in any simplistic way. It is this close proximity which constitutes the poem's essential vulnerability, I would argue. At any moment the poem's elements may be challenged, if not by Camões himself, then by his critics. But after being challenged it will reconstitute itself, through references to other elements in the poem which may qualify present perceptions, or through a sympathetic understanding of practices such as *imitatio*.

Apart from the classical passages, there are two key contemporary passages that underlie Camões' account of da Gama's meeting with the King of Malindi, and they are to be found in the so-called *roteiro* of the voyage, recently translated by Eric Axelson as the 'Diary' of the voyage. Camões, I believe, imaginatively conflates the passages pertaining to the voyage out and the voyage back, in his vision of the impact of the King on the Portuguese:

These are the things the king wore and brought: firstly, a robe of damask lined with green satin, and toque on his head, very rich; two bronze chairs with their cushions, and a canopy of crimson satin, round and hanging from a beam. And he brought an old man as attendant, who carried a short broadsword with a silver scabbard. And he brought many Moorish trumpets, and two ivory tusks the height of a man, with many carvings, played through a hole in the middle. And the horns harmonized very well with the trumpets (*Vasco da Gama: The Diary of His Travels* 46).

Then, on the voyage back,

the king at once sent a long-boat which brought many people, and he sent sheep. He sent to tell the captain that he was very welcome. And for days he had been expecting him. And he sent many other expressions of friendship and peace. The Captain sent with those who came a man to land, to bring the next day the oranges greatly desired by those ill we carried. These were brought at once, with many other fruits ... (51).

What is notable in these passages is that the King is defined by certain sumptuous or otherwise valuable objects; also notable, after the previous experiences of the Portuguese along the coast, is his friendly disposition towards them. In ascribing to him the European classical allusions he does, Camões in a sense transcodes the valuable objects and friendliness into his own intellectual terms; he arrays the King in a classicism close to his own heart, the lexical equivalent of the finery surrounding the King and his obvious nobleness of disposition. So deeply are these elements textually embedded that the King not only refers to classical texts, as we have seen; in stanza 111, he is made to engage in *imitatio* by reanimating a passage from Virgil, and in a way that is of central import.

For in Virgil, Aeneas, welcomed wholeheartedly by Dido, has a love-affair with the African queen, whom he eventually leaves behind in order to follow his destiny (*Aeneid* IV 350–61). She commits suicide, but not without levelling a terrible curse against the founding father of the Roman nation, a curse that will blight all future intercourse between Carthage and Rome (620–30). The symbolic consequences of this curse for latter-day imperialists, deeply aware of their relationship to the past and their current relationship to Africa, are manifest. The incident in Camões, so evidently based on Virgil, responds to this curse and in a manner exorcises it by displacing the sense of past dishonour associated with Aeneas with the present sense of

honour associated with da Gama. If there is a parallel between the way a North African gives succour to the Trojans en route to their promised land, and the way an East African gives succour to the Portuguese en route to the fabulous East Indies, the consequences of the latter example of friendship are to be very different from those of the first. The friendly relationship between Malindi and Portugal is destined to have a long future.

The parallel is given further point if we recall Camões' extensive *translatio imperii* throughout *Os Lusíadas*, whereby he often makes explicit connections between the Portuguese state and ancient Rome. In his epic, indeed, Aeneas' mother, Venus, is for the Portuguese what she was in Virgil for Aeneas and his followers, their patroness and champion; she loves the Portuguese because of the way their language closely resembles Latin, and because of their proud, Roman spirit (*Lusíads* I 33).

Thus the practice of *imitatio* substantiates the conformism inherent in the sixteenth century doctrine of similitude, and so underlines an almost monocultural continuity between ancient and modern, between near and far. Yet we must remember that cultural relativism was also not unknown at this time. Samuel Daniel, echoing earlier sentiments by Roger Ascham, argued the universal force of words, in whatever language those words might be uttered, even the most apparently barbaric:

Suffer then the world to inioy that which it knows, and what it likes: Seeing that whatsoever force of words doth mooue, delight, and sway the affections of men, in what Scythian sorte soeuer it be disposed or vttered, that is true number, measure, eloquence, and the perfection of speach: which I said hath as many shapes as there be tongues or nations in the world, nor can with all the tyrannical Rules of idle Rhetorique be gouerned otherwise then custome and present obseruation will allow (363).

‘Perfection of speech’ then is entirely compatible with Scythian utterances; words have an inherent ‘force’ that cannot ‘be governed otherwise than custome and present observation will allow’. That is, the force of words for Daniel seems to take its momentum from the custom of provincial shapes, as Greene puts it (*The Vulnerable Text* xii–xiii). But Camões had no recourse to the provincial shapes of the King of Malindi, and so had to turn to his own ‘custome and present observation’ as encapsulated in the practice of *imitatio*. It seems evident to me, however, bearing in mind *The Lusíads* as a whole, that Camões, while he might have used his own provincial shapes because he did not want the King’s culture to look barbaric to another, did not share Daniel’s forbearance towards Scythian utterances. Nevertheless, a therapeutically intercultural approach, however unconsciously applied, relates in my mind to Camões’ aesthetic practice; and here I turn to Greene’s notion that a text is a ‘stylized version of a culture’ that ‘tries to regulate cultural tensions and harmonize dissonances; it tries to reproduce those activities of assimilation and rejection, moral discrimination, mythic fabrication, [and] symbolic reordering, that cultures typically perform’ (*The Vulnerable Text* xiii). Can this cultural functioning not be extended to include the absorption of new cultures within the old, if we think of Camões’ presentation of Malindi in *The Lusíads*? An impossible community is lauded in this instance, but for the sake of an ideal civilization that incorporates East Africa within a conception of the Portuguese East Indian Empire. In his vision of a continuous classicism Camões might be seen as trying ‘to regulate cultural tensions and harmonize dissonances’; indeed, he might be seen as trying to harmonize dissonances across worlds. As a consequence, Camões’ text, as Eurocentric as it is (perhaps even because it is Eurocentric), reflects the intellectual energy, refinement and nobleness of disposition of its African subject that is this subject’s due.

Concerning the aesthetics of *imitatio* it is useful to bear in mind that *imitatio* was the only medium for the spontaneous elaboration of the Renaissance poet’s own *inventio* (Nicolopoulos 45). How this *inventio*

functioned takes us back to Greene's notion of the reinvention of past texts, for one of the central driving tensions of poetic practice was to navigate a course that would both include the rich density of the source text and avoid a sense of mere duplication of it. Roger Ascham lists the 'necessarie tooles and instruments' for such a task, incorporating a balance among retention and omission of aspects of the source text, additions, diminishments, reordering, and the changing of the source text entirely (9). Camões' culturally significant redeployment of Virgil and other authors may be seen to draw on the energy generated by this balancing. For example, the validity of the parallel deployed by Camões between Dido and the King of Malindi is indisputable and so gives new, contemporary life to the source text. That is, the just parallel between Malindi and Carthage promotes the desired effect of cultural continuity; but this is tempered by the knowledge that contemporary Malindi is a centre of Portuguese influence in the East Indian Empire. Thus, although the past, reflecting the almost sacred Virgil's words and images, deeply informs the present, the present is far from rendered subservient to that past. Because of this productive interplay of elements, 'an authentic resurrection has occurred', as Greene puts it (*The Light in Troy* 37); as Ascham puts it in more homely terms, the author has expressed 'livelie and perfitelie that example which [he goes] about to folow' (5). Thus the anachronism inherently present in older texts, and a perpetual source of vulnerability, has been controlled and effectively employed, a condition Greene posits for such an authentic resurrection, or, to recall his rather gothic term, for such a 'necromantic' moment (*The Light in Troy* 37).

As we have seen in the present example from Camões and as we gather from Ascham, the Renaissance cultivation of erudition was tightly intertwined with that of imitation:

[A]ll languages, both learned and mother tonges, be gotten,  
and gotten onelie by *Imitation*. For as ye use to heare, so ye

learne to speake: if ye heare no other, ye speake not your selfe: and whome ye onelie heare, of them ye onelie learne.

And therefore, if ye would speake as the best and wisest do, ye must be conversant where the best and wisest are (5).

In other words, to imitate to the best advantage, you must be erudite. In my example from Camões what is really interesting are not the various instances of *eruditio* and *imitatio*, or their frequency, but the dramatized interpenetration of erudition and imitation; for, again, while the King of Malindi alludes to examples from the classical past (*eruditio*), his own words mirror a crucial passage in Virgil (*imitatio*). The interpenetration reflects, from the point of view of a poet, high praise for the King, as it is so firmly and fittingly embedded in the poetics of the age.

Finally, then, the King's presence in Camões' text is conveyed through a sophisticated poetics, which in turn tells of his value as a subject, especially in the challenging context of the times, elaborated on by Nicolopoulos, who points out that *imitatio* as a practice was beset by 'cultural and linguistic disparities' as well as 'creeping anachronism' (53). Meeting a challenge, then, in the face of cultural, linguistic and temporal disparities, is the key aesthetic strategy that we must foreground in such a context, not a wilful denial of coevalness to a non-European culture which has its roots in cultural imperialism. The latter is the path of sterile demystification; the former, of remystification.

Camões' model author, Virgil, was himself steeped in imitative practice that was also tempered by the challenges of his age. Virgil's achievement was to create a functional and pleasing synthesis of ancient Greek models and contemporary Roman cultural and linguistic practices (Jackson Knight 400–03). He resolved the ever-present problem inherent in *imitatio* of having to deal with anachronistic elements in a way that did not compromise, but even enhanced, present intentions. In doing so he ennobled and enriched the Latin language. In many ways Virgil and his works are central to Camões

and *Os Lusíadas*. Not only does Camões deploy Virgil in the material fabric of his epic in terms of informative *eruditio* and constitutive *imitatio*, he at one crucial point also uses Virgil (in somewhat exasperated fashion) as an *exemplum* of how the poet ideally should be treated by the state (*Lusíadas* V 93–94). Camões would ennoble and enrich Portuguese language and culture with his *imitatio* of Virgil. Though *imitatio* is vulnerable to the sometimes overpowering application of Camonian similitude, with its consequences of cultural imperialism, in the present case the Sultan of Malindi's voice is the authentically resurrected voice, strengthened by contemporary events, at the core of a worthy and rigorous poetic tradition.

## NOTES

1. Sidney Welch claims that Camões studied in the College of St Michael in the University of Coimbra from the age of 13 to 18. He cites no source, though perhaps the source from his previous note is meant to cover this one too (442). The previous note, which seeks to substantiate the claim of 'early commentators' that Camões' uncle, Bento de Camões, was chancellor of the university, relies on chapter six of W. Storck's *Vida e Obras de Luis de Camões*. This reference is missing from the bibliography. The verity of the information to be derived from 'early commentators' is, unfortunately, uncertain.
2. The literal translation in brackets is Greene's, as is the translation from Virgil.

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