

BILINGUAL EDITION
PORTUGUESE ORIGINALS | ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS

LUÍS DE CAMÕES

A GLOBAL POET FOR TODAY

Edition

Helder Macedo and Thomas Earle

Introduction

Helder Macedo

Preparation of Texts and Translation

Thomas Earle

Illustrations

André Carrilho

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Luís de Camões – A Global Poet for Today

AUTHOR

Luís de Camões

EDITION

Helder Macedo, with the contribution of Thomas Earle

INTRODUCTION

Helder Macedo

PREPARATION OF TEXTS AND ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS

Thomas Earle, with the contribution of Helder Macedo

ILLUSTRATIONS

André Carrilho

GRAPHIC DESIGN

João Jesus

(based on a concept by Dania Afonso)

FONTS

Sabon, originally created by Jan Tschichold

Usual, by Rui Abreu

Cantata One, by Joana Correia

CONCEPT

Miguel Neto (editorial coordination of this title)

João Pedro Ruivo

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info@lisbonpoets.co

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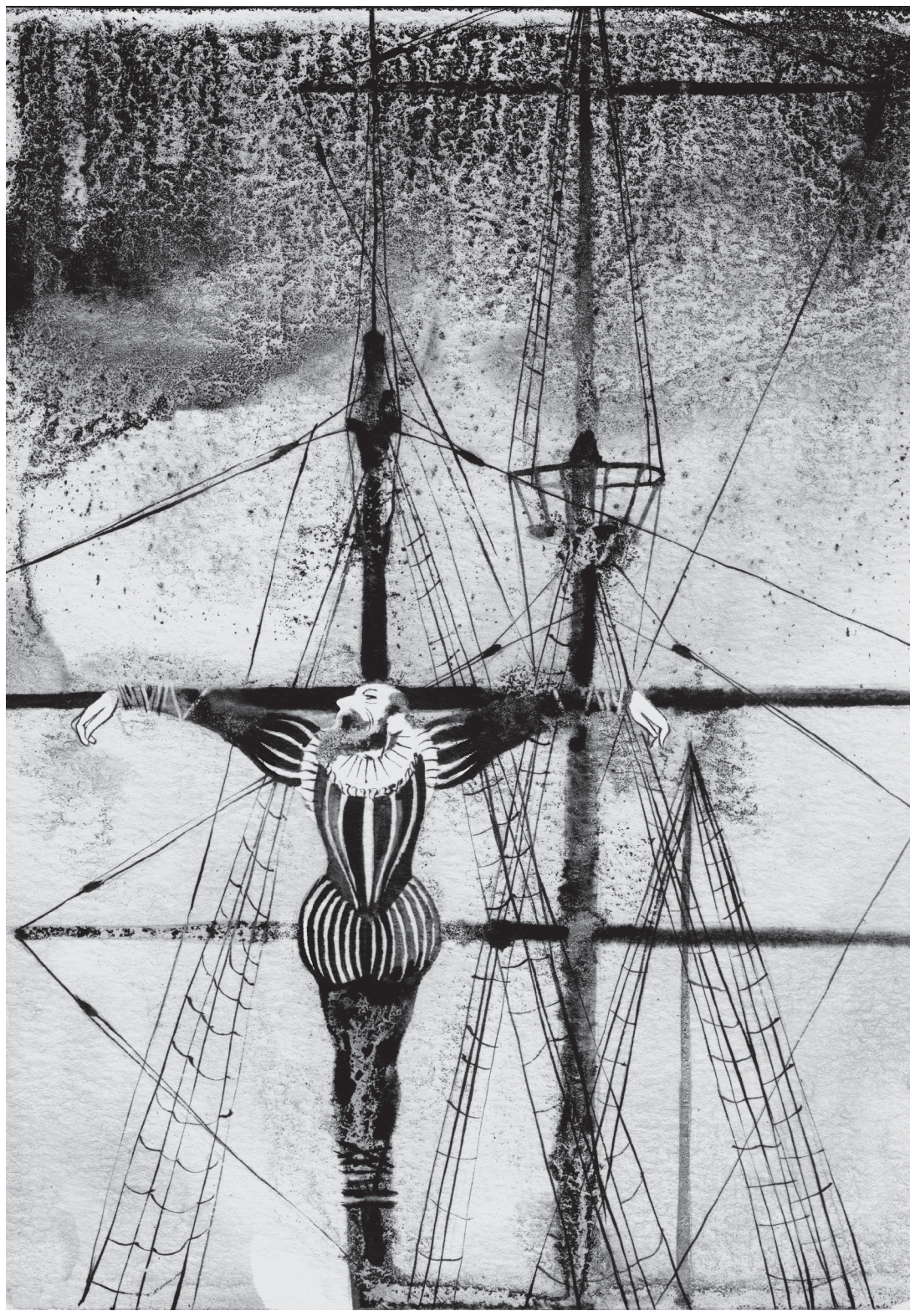
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Most translators of Camões have tried to recreate *The Lusíads* and the lyric poems in English verse. Our aim is different, to produce a literal, prose version. So far as possible, the translation proceeds line by line, but without concern either for rhyme or for metre. The aim throughout is to help the reader to understand Camões's own words. Where those words seem to require some additional explanation, usually of references to classical mythology, that is given in the translation in small capitals.

The text of the extracts from *The Lusíads* comes from the edition prepared by Prof. Costa Pimpão. In accordance with modern practice the orthography has been revised to reflect the way Portuguese was probably spoken in the sixteenth century. Very few of Camões's lyric poems were published in his lifetime and there is no autograph (manuscript in the poet's hand). There are, therefore, many uncertainties surrounding his work. The text of the poems in the anthology has been established with reference to the monumental editions by the Brazilian scholars Cleonice Berardinelli and Leodegário de Azevedo Filho. The edition of the Lyrics by Maria de Lurdes Saraiva has also been very useful. We have not followed any of these slavishly, but the information they provide has helped in the elaboration of the texts printed here.

The chronology of Camões's lyric poetry is unknown. Our selection suggests a progression from hope to experience and from experience to despair which corresponds to what is known of the events of his life. The choice and ordering of the excerpts from *The Lusíads* were made having regard to the thematic and conceptual links between the epic and the lyric poems.

Helder Macedo/Thomas Earle



INTRODUCTION

Luís de Camões lived in a world in transition. The existential pilgrimage recorded in his poetry is a search for something as indefinable, and as revolutionarily modern, as the pursuit of happiness on earth. In the process, he was a poet of doubt rather than certainty, rupture rather than continuity, immanence rather than transcendence, experience rather than faith and, at the end of a life “scattered in pieces through the world”, he found fragmentation instead of the totality he had desired. His work helps us to understand not only the time in which he lived but our own time. He was the first European poet with prolonged direct experience of cultures as different as those of Southern Africa and the East. His majestic epic poem, *The Lusiads*, is as much the public celebration of a nation as an auto-biographical representation of his own life. The English critic C. M. Bowra, author of a major work on epic poetry, *From Virgil to Milton*, considers that *The Lusiads* is “in many respects the epic of Humanism”. And Friedrich Schlegel, one of the founders of German Romanticism, considers it “the supreme example of epic poetry” and “the only heroic poem of the Modern period”. Both these assertions are justified. But it is an ambiguous epic, situated in a hiatus of History between a past deserving of celebration and the vision of a future contaminated by doubt and uncertainty.

The Lusiads has been translated into most European and into several non-European languages. The first of many English translations was published in 1655 and the most recent in 2001. Camões’ lyric poetry has been comparatively neglected, but it is certainly no less impressive. Indeed, the epic of *The Lusiads* can be better understood from the perspective of his lyric poetry. And, in translation, both gain

by being as close as possible to the original. This bilingual edition provides an ample selection of Camões' lyric poetry complemented by some passages of the epic, avoiding the often distorting constrictions of rhyme and metre.

In *The Lusíads* Camões transposes the historical events of epic celebration – the pioneering voyage of Vasco da Gama, which opened the doors of Renaissance Humanism to the modern world – into the metaphorical representation of a conflict between two complementary pagan deities, Venus and Bacchus, both children of Jupiter. Venus favours the Portuguese while Bacchus opposes them. But Bacchus is also characterized as the mythical ancestor of the Portuguese, through Lusus, from whom the poem's title is derived. From being the powerful god he had once been – and former lord of the India which the Portuguese mariners were seeking – Bacchus had become a corrupt and weakened fabricator of deceptions. In his decadence he was, in some ways, akin to the Portuguese nation itself which, three quarters of a century after the arrival of the mariners in India, had fallen into “avarice and ignorance, harsh, dull, lowly and joyless”. Through successive personal interventions in the epic narrative of the voyage and the history of Portugal up to that time, Camões makes it clear that in celebrating the past he is criticizing the present. The real voyage of discovery that he is offering his contemporaries – “the new daring” – is the poem itself. This metaphorical voyage in the “angry seas” of poetry will culminate not with the arrival of the mariners in India but with their discovery of the magic island into which Venus had metamorphosed herself so that the mariners could land there to “refresh [their] tired natures”. It is an island of the imagination, an “angelic, painted isle” where, in an apparent paradox, Venus restores the values traditionally associated with Bacchus before his decadence, as the utopian project of a future regeneration.

This brief summary is hardly enough even to suggest the multiple complexities of the poem, but it points to the contradictions inherent in Portuguese society in the lifetime of Camões and to his own personal circumstances. Camões is as much the protagonist of *The Lusíads* as he is of his lyric poetry. And it is his own personal circumstances that he records in what is possibly the most emphatically anti-epic poem in Portuguese literature: the autobiographical Elegy I (“Simonides, the poet, talking”), written soon after his arrival in India and his almost immediate first experience of bearing arms in the service of the Viceroy. Before a lengthy description of his voyage to that “longed-for and distant land, the grave of every poor and honourable man”, Camões fictionalizes a dialogue between “the poet Simonides” and “the captain Themistocles”, in which the supposed inventor of the “art of memory” offers the glorious warrior the possibility of total recall. But the warrior replies that he would prefer an art that would enable him to forget the past. The shift here implied in the traditional topic of Arms and Letters (while retaining for letters the function of ensuring remembrance of what should not be forgotten) takes away from arms the entitlement to poetic celebration. This disjunction, which manifests the exact opposite of the ostensible purpose of *The Lusíads*, will be emphasized at the end of the Elegy, when the bellicose imperial values associated with the epic are contrasted with the just values of pastoral peace.

The Portugal of the formative years of Camões was a dynamic sheaf of contradictory tensions and the Lisbon of his turbulent youth – the main European port for trade with the East – was a vast market where everything could be purchased, including good and evil, vice and virtue. A poet of the previous generation, Francisco de Sá de Miranda, had already spoken of the arrival in the port of Lisbon of “the white poison” which “caused men to wander about the city streets