

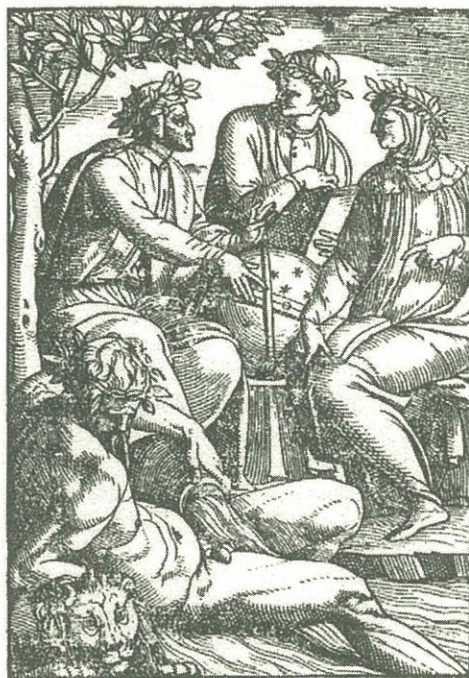


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HÉLIO J.S. ALVES

The most powerful allusive reading of the Ocean in
Os Lusíadas: notes on Corte-Real's *Sepúlveda e Lianor*

«Num mar de pensamentos engolfado».

This line, from the Second Canto of the poem I wish to introduce, *Sepúlveda e Lianor* by Jerónimo Corte-Real (1594, posth.), reflects an ancient literary topic which has perhaps its greatest source in Virgil's *tristi turbatus pectora bello* (*Aeneid* VIII: 29) and celebrated uses in English in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (III, 1: 61), *to take arms against a sea of troubles*, and in Milton's *Paradise Lost* (X: 718), *in a troubled sea of passion tossed*. But Corte-Real is (as usual) closer to Milton and omits *bellum* (Virgil) or *arms* (Shakespeare), *i. e.*, war, leaving only the Portuguese *mar*, the sea, as figure. Even the word *engolfado* can be said to involve the sea: it comes from *golfo* (Port. and It.) or *gulf* (Eng.). Sepúlveda's state of mind is thus described as a dive into an agitated sea.

In the poem *Sepúlveda e Lianor*, such a "dive" actually occurs. The agitated state of the hero's mind is subjected to an extended geographical allegory which takes the most of two entire Cantos. It is this "geography" as allegory or *translatio* of a psychological struggle that will provide my initial approach to the Ocean as theme in the epic.

What follows is a brief summary of this part of the plot. Sepúlveda and Lianor are in love with each other. Lianor's father, Garcia, wishes to marry her to another man, called Falcão, ignoring that her daughter is already married in secret to Sepúlveda. Sepúlveda manages to let Garcia find out about the clandestine wedding. In anger, Garcia locks Lianor in, determined to get her married to Falcão whatever it takes. In spite of her prisoner status, she and Sepúlveda exchange love letters. Her last letter to him (composed by Corte-Real in a fine piece in *terzine*) confirms that Lianor only has eyes for Sepúlveda and that she is ready to sacrifice her life for this love. It is at this stage that Sepúlveda begins to realize that he has to do something to release her from her father's commitment to Falcão and to make him accept Sepúlveda's engagement with her. «Num mar de pensamentos engolfado», he begins to wish for Falcão's death... And it is at this moment that the poem turns into a mythological plot and explicit allegory.

His stream of thoughts is allegorically transformed into a voyage, a voyage by the god Love. A double meaning is opened by the narrative: on the one hand, Sepúlveda is engaged in his own tormented thoughts; on the other hand, and at the same time (both events are narratively interlaced), Love learns to deal with the human situation through a flight that takes him to the Isle of Vengeance (*Ilha da Vingança, Isola della Vendetta*). First, he learns what he needs to do from his mother Venus – that is to say, allegorically Sepúlveda is driven not only emotionally, but also intellectually, by love. Then, he flies into the sky from where on high he sees the entire world, described at length by the poet. Amongst the many things Love sees from up there, before arriving at the isle in this geographical allegory, there is the sea, of which he recognizes three types:

Vio Neptuno aprazível onde a força
E braveza de Eolo não chegava,
Vio por ella correr concavos lenhos
Com vella inchada e prospera viagem.
Noutras partes revolto o Reino liquido
Vio com sembrãte horribel, e as inchadas
Ondas, bramando alçarse em procellosa
Luta, quasi tocar as altas nuves.
E vio ligeiras naos que navegando
Com socorro galerno, e tempo amigo:
De supito cubertas de terribel,
Medonha escuridão, e acerbo fado,
Com desestrada volta se escondião
No salgado elemento embravecido,
E os tristes navegantes condenados
Num ponto a miseravel, cruel morte. (*Canto II, f. 29r*)

The three types are, in order: sea in calm weather, where ships sail well and easily; a stormy sea, sailed by ships in utter difficulty; and, finally, a disastrous combination of both, apparent good weather quickly changing into a storm so bad that navigators are condemned to terrible death (*morte*, the last word of the tract).

Together with the flight of Love itself, this is a mirror-image of Sepúlveda's own concerns and anguishes:

Quantas vezes subido falsamente
De um vão desejo a bens quasi impossiveis,
Em tanta altura, vendo [h]oras ditosas:
Alegres conjunções, tempos amigos,
Seguindo a suavidade imaginada
E o pensamento solto em mil branduras
Com duro sobressalto em si tornando:

Do fantastico bem se arrependia. (*Canto II*, f. 31v)

Tempo amigo or *tempos amigos*, an expression from both passages I have just quoted, makes for an equivalence: the macrocosmic adventure of Love is an extended metaphor for the microcosmic state of Sepúlveda's mind. Love, taking sight of the Isle of Vengeance is conceived as analogous to Sepúlveda discovering the way to solve the problem of his forced separation from Lianor.

The concept is remarkable, not only in the sheer dimension of the thing, but also in its intertextual significance. In Corte-Real's poem, Venus guides Cupid, or Love, to find a means to obtain vengeance from those who prevent Love's actions. The goddess of love instructs Cupid to make good use of an island. This is similar to what happens in *Os Lusíadas* by Camões, published a couple of decades earlier, in 1572. There, Venus converses with her son, instructing him on what to do in an isle she has prepared. In *Sepúlveda e Lianor* the Isle of Vengeance is not conceived of by Venus. But one of the extraordinary things about the isle in Corte-Real's poem is that it is the habitation and quarters of Venus's *sister*, Nemesis. «Também esta de Júpiter é filha», Venus says to Cupid, as if to say that they are kin and akin, they are family and somehow similar, even though antithetical: Venus is soft and tender, Nemesis is hard and cruel. And there is no specific allusiveness, as far as I can see, to indicate that Corte-Real is referring to *Os Lusíadas*. I believe that this is because there was no need for verbal allusion: the reader would not fail to recognize the radicalism of Corte-Real's dialogue with Camões.

The comparison is complex, so let me concentrate, for our purpose, on the role of the sea in these allegories.

In *Os Lusíadas*, there are two significant lines pronounced by Venus to her son: «No mesmo mar, que sempre temeroso/Lhe foi, quero que sejam repousados» (IX, 39). The sea, in this case the Ocean, which throughout the poem threatened the Portuguese sailors, should now, at the end of the journey, be the place where they can rest and find the joys absent until then. According to Venus, the Isle will be the place in the sea for a love that prospers:

Quero que haja no reino Neptunino
Onde eu nasci, progénie forte e bela
[...]
Mal haverá na terra quem se guarde,
Se teu fogo [i. e. Cupid's fire] imortal nas águas arde. (IX, 42)

No such thing happens in Venus's speech in *Sepúlveda e Lianor*. There, the isle of which the goddess speaks about is a piece of barren land, resulting from punishment rather than compensation, where the sea is reduced to being a force which increases the isolation and sinister quality of the place:

[...] hum sitio esteril:
Espantoso se vê, de ondas cercado,
Onde a fera Raunusia vingadora
Tem sua habitação e assento esquivo
[...]
Por justo, e merecido, alto castigo. (*Canto II*, f. 22)

The phrase *de ondas cercado* is the only one in the entire extended allegory referring to the sea in connection with the isle. The absence of the sea is clear in the passage, and the isle is *estéril*. No generation can come of it. In fact, as it soon becomes clear, the only thing that this piece of land can generate is destruction: Cupid will find in it the resources to achieve his vendetta. Falcão will die. And, shockingly, the murderer will be Love himself.

The concept of a destructive sea, this time the Ocean, spills over into other essential scenes and places in *Sepúlveda e Lianor*. As in the three types of sea that I quoted earlier, the predominant version will be the third and last: serene and calm waters can suddenly become portents of violence and treachery, not unlike love itself as conceived of by Corte-Real. We shall see that, in a next occasion, the poet of *Sepúlveda* will be more explicit about his answer to the moral and poetical challenge posed by *Os Lusíadas*.

But before we reach the point of allusion, I wish to consider still another episode which is highly significant of both the presence of the Ocean in these epics and of the literary relationship between *Sepúlveda e Lianor* and *Os Lusíadas*. I am referring to the human voyage itself. As you know, Camões tells the story of Vasco da Gama's successful navigation from Belém, near Lisbon, to Calicut in India. Canto V of *Os Lusíadas* is the place where most of the voyage is told. Corte-Real, however, tells not only a different voyage, taking place half a century later, but also a *reverse* voyage, from India to Portugal, which is interrupted by shipwreck in southern Africa. This is how both poets begin. First, Camões:

E como é já no mar costume usado,
A vela desfraldando, o céu ferimos,
Dizendo: «Boa viagem!». Logo o vento
Nos troncos fez o usado movimento. (V, 1)

As someone used to life at sea, the poet mentions the sail (perhaps the mainsail, or a synecdoche of all the sails), the shouting and the force of the wind pushing the wood of the ship.

And now for Corte-Real:

Já do Patrão no ares soa o vivo

Apito, e a pesada âncora levão,
Deixãose vir abaixo as despregadas
Velas, e segueas logo hũa alta grita,
Inchase o grande treu, a nao com força
As ondas rompe e faz leda viage.

We can observe further care with details: the whistle, the anchor, the exact name for the sail (*treu*), without loss of any of the points showing in Camões, the act of releasing the sails, the shouting, the wind (indirectly and succinctly expressed by the verb *inchar-se* in Corte-Real), the movement of the ship and the expression «boa viagem!» appearing in *Sepúlveda* with the different, and more elevated, word «leda».

Again, we cannot say that Corte-Real alludes to *Os Lusíadas*. Yet, it becomes clear that Corte-Real reverses and, in more than one sense, corrects the predecessor poem, at the same time as he establishes his distance or detachment from it. To summarize: travelling West to East becomes travelling East to West; a voyage with a beginning and an end, with a triumphant mythological island awaiting the Portuguese, becomes a forever interrupted voyage in shipwreck, and a destructive mythological island; a general reference to «costume usado» is substituted by care about what actually happens when a sailing ship departs; a general word for sails becomes a specific technical term for a certain sail; the standard expression to wish somebody a pleasant trip is changed into a word better adapted to the high linguistic standards of epic poetry. Distance, correction and reversal are, therefore, the criteria of Corte-Real's relationship with Camões's *Os Lusíadas*, to the point that it is difficult or even impossible to speak of rewriting. So far, no specific allusion whatsoever is meant. It is clear that Corte-Real is involved in dismantling the foundations of *Os Lusíadas* at almost every level, from the moral and allegorical to diction itself. But the poet seems to have known that this procedure could only take place without falling into the trap of imitation or allusion as it is usually understood. The sovereign independence, even haughtiness, of *Sepúlveda e Lianor* stands out before the reader, who is forced to admit the originality of the entire endeavour, whether (s)he likes it or not.

Despite everything, Corte-Real is not completely exempt from the temptation of allusion. As we shall see, in the few moments of *Sepúlveda e Lianor* about which we can authoritatively speak of rewriting, the text comments on Camões, in a kind of sophisticated play with *Os Lusíadas* that now promotes recognition rather than correction or reversal. Corte-Real never gets too close. But this time he leaves just enough clues, that is, words and lines or half-lines, to make sure that the reader picks up the allusion.

The one Oceanic example I wish to show is the following. As *Sepúlveda* is *actually* sailing across the Indian Ocean, love indirectly acts among the gods of the sea. Proteus falls in love with Lianor and the sea nymphs become jealous of her beauty. In Canto VII, three of these nymphs, led by the princess Amphitrite, wife of Posei-

don/Neptune, join each other in plotting against Lianor by calling the winds and their king, Aeolus, to convince him to avenge them (vendetta, again). This, of course, is in the Homeric tradition of the interview between gods, of which we have many examples in classical poetry. A close model is the interview between Thetis and Hephaestus in *Iliad XVIII*, where the goddess, disturbed by what is happening to her son Achilles, asks the god for a shield to protect her son. The structure is of a tearful request by Thetis followed by a favourable reply by Hephaestus. As is well known, the same model and structure is repeated in the *Odyssey* and in Virgil's *Aeneid*, as well as in a series of Silver Age and Renaissance epics, usually with a female god requesting help and a male one providing it. Therefore, in a sense, Corte-Real is only including himself in the tradition, as he makes Amphitrite the requester and Aeolus the provider. The fact that the scene occurs in the Ocean reduces considerably the number of models Corte-Real could be following, and there is no doubt that he specifically alludes to, for example, Virgil, in the scene from Book V of the *Aeneid* where Venus exposes her anguish and frustration to Neptune who shows his support for her. However, it is the terms which Corte-Real uses to insert himself in the epic tradition that clarify his stance.

The interview is carefully prepared. Amphitrite asks for Neptune's permission to take away with her three nymphs *somewhere* («a qualquer parte»). They arrive where the Portuguese carrack is being pushed onwards by Favonio (a soft Spring wind). Amphitrite calls him and asks him to go to Aeolia to get his king, as she will wait for them. Favonio flies off and the ship stops, the sails with no wind to fill them. As Aeolus gets the message, he obeys immediately and takes with him to the Indian Ocean a troupe of Spring winds, leaving the tempestuous ones closed in prison. As they arrive (and Corte-Real provides a catalogue of their names and functions), the carrack begins to advance again. Meanwhile, Aeolus meets Amphitrite and sees that she is sad and depressed, so much so that it affects her usual beauty. This question of beauty – which after all is the point about Lianor – is the motto which fires off the interview, with Amphitrite's first words:

A envejosa Rainha, levantando
Os olhos lá no ceo, diz com suspiro:
«Não te espantes, Rey, verme diferente,
Espanta-te de verme ainda com vida.
Se meu mal não te move a que vingança
Me des, eu ma darei de mim, que a honra
Perdida me restaure, pois mofina
Mais que todas naci, mais sem ventura!»
Dizendo estas palavras, banha o peito
Com salgado licor...

In spite of its roots in the tradition of the supernatural interview, this introitus to

Amphitrite's speech alludes magnificently, and quite specifically, to not one but two scenes of this type in Camões's *Os Lusíadas*, the words of Venus to Jupiter in Canto II and the arrival of Bacchus in Neptune's realm in Canto VI. Corte-Real makes Amphitrite begin her speech to Aeolus in the same Oceanic mode employed by Bacchus in *Os Lusíadas*:

Ó Neptuno (lhe disse), não te espantes
De Baco nos teus reinos receberes,
Porque também c'os grandes e possantes
Mostra a Fortuna injusta seus poderes.

You may have noticed that Amphitrite recovers the very same expression of Bacchus in the first line: *não te espantes* (do not marvel, do not be astonished). But Corte-Real goes further, and plays with it in the next line: *espanta-te de ver-me ainda com vida!* As if the beauty of Lianor could endanger the life of an immortal goddess! The infinitely exaggerated hyperbole is winking towards *Os Lusíadas*. It does not imply rejection of Camões's poem. In a sense, Corte-Real shows great admiration for it, for he now wishes to include *Os Lusíadas* in the lot of epics worthy of verbal allusion. But, of course, at the same time, *Sepúlveda e Lianor*, as a poem, is showing that it can imitate Camões with a strong sense of authority.

Corte-Real's exercise continues in the next couple of lines, by exploring the absurd idea of the goddess losing, or even taking, her own life: *se meu mal não te move a que vingança/me dês, eu ma darei de mim*. At the same time, Amphitrite is concerned with her own "honour", a concept that specks more of Iberian aristocratic society than of Greek myth: *que a honra/ perdida me restaure*. All this synthetically reflects the whole stance of Bacchus in Canto VI of *Os Lusíadas*, as the god there looks for vengeance (*vingueis*, VI, 28), fears for his own existence and says:

Que aquelas grandes honras que sabeis
Que no mundo ganhei (...)
Todas vejo abatidas desta gente. (VI, 32)

Both the scene by Camões and the one by Corte-Real occur in the Indian Ocean and both involve the Greek gods of the sea. In this sense, they are a symbolic transposition, to the language of the Renaissance's recovery of ancient myth, of Portuguese concerns with the role of the sea in the building of empire. The Greek gods feel challenged by the new Oceans travelled by the Portuguese, and feel that Vengeance is a necessary act for survival. Later on in the same Canto of *Sepúlveda*, Aeolus declares himself injured and offended by Portuguese seamanship, something that helps to explain why he is so willing to adhere to Amphitrite's request to make the carrack sink.

But the next few lines pronounced by Amphitrite,

...pois mofina
Mais que todas naci, mais sem ventura!»
Dizendo estas palavras, banha o peito
Com salgado licor,

are a sly reference to another one of Camões's interviews, that of Venus before Jupiter. Here are the relevant lines:

«Faça-se como Baco determina:
Assentarei, enfim, que fui mofina.
Este povo que é meu por quem derramo
As lágrimas que em vão caídas vejo...
[...]
Mas moura enfim nas mãos das brutas gentes,
Que pois eu fui...» E nisto, de mimosa,
O rosto banha em lágrimas ardentes. (*Os Lusíadas*, II, 39-41)

The first Portuguese commentator of Camões's poem, Manoel Correia, argued that the missing word in Venus's interruption was to be the same she used earlier to qualify her situation: *mofina* ("unfortunate"). This would be so because in *Os Lusíadas* Venus is actually reinstating her case to Jupiter through varied repetition, so that it is logical that *mofina*, as Correia wished, would be the keyword. Corte-Real's allusion, therefore, is, I think, unmistakable. To the extent that even the reference to tears is placed in the same location, the end of the speech (*o rosto banha em lágrimas*, in Camões; *banha o peito com salgado licor*, in Corte-Real) rather than its beginning, as in Homer's interview between Thetis and Hephaestus (*Iliad XVIII*: 428) and Virgil's own interview between Venus and Jupiter (*Aeneid I*: 228-9). Corte-Real is signalling *Os Lusíadas* by employing the same keyword, *mofina*, and the same structure, so that his imitation of Homer and Virgil is in fact filtered through Camões. How should we interpret such a rewriting?

This time, the great features of Corte-Real's reconception of epic cannot, I believe, be called for. No distance or detachment, no correction and no reversal of *Os Lusíadas*. There is perhaps a kind of assumed rivalry with Camões, but also a respect for his achievement which here is, in a way, continued and developed. Corte-Real seems to enjoy the intertextuality and to feel capable enough of imitating *Os Lusíadas* in a way that recreates the predecessor poem in a totally different episode, and yet quoting from it without loss of poetic personality. This is not the stance of someone who fears another poet. Although delightfully funny – the rest of Amphitrite's speech could be cited in proof of this – this is not satire. The point, I think, is different: for Corte-Real, Amphitrite builds on an epic tradition that now includes a Portuguese swerve to it, through Camões's Bacchus and Venus. What is paramount at this point of

Sepúlveda e Lianor is the building of what makes a tradition specific or even unique, a “Portuguese poetic history”.

Obviously, the crossing of the oceans and the moral, philosophical and poetical issues that it raises are central to this history, as *Sepúlveda e Lianor* shows. «*Num mar de pensamentos engolfado*» is the allegory of a disordered national and imperial existence in a ship tossed in the midst of moral and psychological troubles, but it is also the figure for a cosmos – a *poetics*, in the original sense of the word – that is effectively built to high and bold summits of achievement by these epics.