

NOTES ON CAMÕES

George Monteiro

Brown University

The first of the four notes that follow reports on a nineteenth-century American textbook that incorporates excerpts from Os Lusíadas in so-called "letters" contrived to carry out its various lessons. The second records the evidence that the American poet Walt Whitman showed some interest in Camões. The third recovers a reference to Camões in the writings of the Englishman William Hazlitt. And the fourth describes an uncommon edition of Lord Viscount Strangford's translations of Camões, first published in London by J. Carpenter in 1803 as Poems. from the Portuguese of Luis de Camoens.

1.

A writer's influence, both at home and abroad, can be measured in various ways, drawing on various kinds of evidence. First of all, one might search out reviews of his publications along with published commentaries or observations. The picture these provide could be fleshed out by mentions in contemporary or later letters as well as entries in diaries and references en passant in newspapers and journals. Literary works by those who read him can be read for reactions to his work or even to appropriations and rewritings. Literary histories, popular and scholarly journal articles may provide more generalized summaries of existing evidence of influence and reputation or present newly discovered evidence. Was our author's work anthologized, and if so, which works appear in those anthologies, either in their entirety or in excerpt? And has he made it into textbooks?

At home—that is to say in Portugal and in other Portuguese-speaking countries—investigations into the scope and variety of Camões's influence have been undertaken and doubtlessly continue to this day. On Camões's influence abroad, however, especially in non-Portuguese-language countries, there has been less work—understandably—though of late his influence in English-speaking countries has received renewed attention.¹

Camões's work was fairly well known in the United States throughout the nineteenth century. He was read—either Os Lusíadas or his lyric poetry—by writers such as Joel Barlow, Richard Henry Wilde, Edgar Allan Poe, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Walt Whitman, Herman Melville, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, and Emily Dickinson. Their main conduits to Camões's poetry (for they knew little or no Portuguese) were three in number. First, there was William Julius Mickle's translation of Os Lusíadas—"the best English translation," claimed one anonymous reviewer in 1900, "is that by Mickle, first edition 1775."² Second, there was Lord Strangford's (Percy Clinton Sidney Smythe, Sixth Viscount Strangford's) Poems, from the Portuguese of Luis de Camoens, first published in 1803 in London by J. Carpenter and reprinted numerous times on both sides of the Atlantic during the first decade of the century. In the United States there appeared H. Maxwell's edition in Philadelphia in 1805, Kid and Thomas' in Baltimore in 1808, and West and Greenleaf's in Boston in 1809.³ Third, there was Longfellow's generous selection of Camões's work in his large and capacious anthology The Poets and Poetry of Europe. First published in Philadelphia by

¹ Among the studies of Camões in England and the United States, there are: (1) Madonna Letzring's "The Influence of Camoens in English Literature," Revista Camoniana (São Paulo, Brazil), 1 (1964), pp. 1-180; 2 (1965), pp. 27-54; and 3 (1971), pp. 57-134; (2) Norwood Andrews, Jr.'s "A Projecção de Camões e d'Os Lusíadas nos Estados Unidos da América," in Os Lusíadas: Estudos Sobre a Projecção de Camões em Culturas e Literaturas Estrangeiras, 1984); (3) Camões em Inglaterra, coordinated by Maria Leonor Machado de Sousa (Lisbon: Ministério da Educação/ Instituto de Cultura e Língua Portuguesa, 1992); and (4) George Monteiro's The Presence of Camões: Influences on the Literature of England, America, and Southern Africa (Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1996).

² Anonymous, "Macao and the Camoens Memorial," The Literary World (Boston), 31 (Aug. 1, 1900), pp. 152-53.

³ Norwood Andrews, Jr. "Camões and Some of his Readers in American Imprints of Lord Strangford's Translation in the Nineteenth Century," in Empire in Transition: The Portuguese World in the Time of Camões, ed. Alfred Hower and Richard A. Preto-Rodas (Gainesville: Center for Latin American Studies and University of Florida Press, 1985), p. 205.

Carey and Hart in 1849, this volume's selections from Camões's poetry contributed considerably to the setting of reader taste and preference throughout the second half of the century. Longfellow also drew on Camões for descriptions of places—cities and rivers—in his Poems of Places, a collection of thirty-one volumes, published by Houghton Mifflin in Boston (1876-1879).

What I would add here to the accumulating evidence that Camões was read in the United States in the nineteenth century is the information that excerpts from Os Lusíadas appeared in a textbook designed for use in grammar schools in the United States over at least the final decades of the century. Even though that excerpts from his poetry were used in a book for use in the grade schools will be news to many. That textbook—and I have not looked for others—is The Fifth Reader of the Popular Series, prepared by Marcius Willson in Philadelphia for J. B. Lippincott Company in 1881.

The general plan for this series of readers was “that of ‘localizing events around a home centre of attraction.’” “In the ‘Around the World’ series of letters, which forms a prominent feature in the present volume, our aim has been to introduce, wherever practicable, such brief characterizations of foreign people and countries, and such historic sketches, scenes, and incidents of travel, and remarks thereon, as will be of permanent value. Although the narrative style might be supposed to prevail here, yet description more abounds, while the inter-woven adaptations and selections are exceedingly varied in character.” The heuristic aim of the textbook is to teach the “Nature and Uses of Figurative Language.” What is precisely meant by figurative is explained at the outset. “Words,” it is explained, “are used in a figurative sense, when they are to be understood in a sense different from their plain and obvious, or primary, meaning, and are thus made to express some idea with the greater force, through the medium of what is, literally, an untruth. Figurative language is generally based upon some real or fancied resemblance between objects; and it is employed when the mind bestows upon the real object under consideration, the qualities or attributes of something else which resembles it.” (15) Hence there is throughout the book, understandably, a high premium placed on examples taken from imaginative literature of the highest order.

It is in Chapter Twenty-nine, “From Gibraltar to the Cape of Good Hope,” that Camões makes his appearances. The chapter is divided into ten sections: (1) “Madeira and the Canaries,” (2) “The

Garden of Armida: An Episode," (3) "Climate and Trade-Winds," (4) "Monrovia—Equatorial Calms," (5) "St. Helena," (6) "Napoleon at St. Helena," (7) "Death of Napoleon," (8) "Character of Napoleon," (9) "Onward to the Cape," and (10) "The Spacious firmament." Camões is quoted in sections one, two, and nine. All quotations are from Os Lusíadas and they are given in William Julius Mickle's translation published as The Lusiad; or, the Discovery of India. An Epic Poem in 1776.

In section one "Madeira and the Canaries," Camões is quoted twice. First, Vasco de Gama's description of Madeira is given:

"A shore so flowery, and so sweet an air,
Venus might build her dearest cottage there." (318)

Second, after it has been explained that the Canary Island "are, doubtless the Fortunate, or Happy Islands, of the ancients," Camões's couplet is quoted:

"Here, midst the billows of the ocean, smiles
A flowery sister train,—the Happy Isles." (319)

In section two, "The Gardens of Armida: An Episode," Camões is quoted once. When the simulated voyage taken by the writer of the textbook and his students are "off the coast of Sahara," the culminating lines come from Os Lusíadas:

"From the green verge where Mauritania ends,
To Ethiopia's line, the dreary waste extends." (323)

Camões does not appear in sections four through eight, which with one exception are taken up with a visit to the island of St. Helena's and considerations of the exiled Napoleon Bonaparte, the exiled emperor who was the island's most famous resident.

In section nine "Onward to the Cape," Camões is quoted at greater length. Vasco de Gama's speech on "the changing appearances of the heavens" in the Southern Hemisphere is quoted in excerpts of six lines, both from Canto 5:

"O'er the wild waves, as southward thus we stray,
Our port unknown, unknown the watery way,
Each night we see, impressed with solemn awe,
Our guiding stars and native skies withdraw:

In the wide void we lose their cheering beams;
Lower, and lower still, the pole-star gleams.

“While, nightly, thus, the lonely seas we brave,
Another pole-star rises o'er the wave:
Full to the south a shining Cross appears;
Our heaving breasts the blissful omen cheers;
Seven radiant stars compose the hallowed sign,
That rose still higher o'er the wavy brine.” (335-36)

In Chapter Thirty-one, “From the Cape to Bombay,” there are no quotations from Camões but in section one, “At the Cape,” he is referred to this way:

Prof. Howard gave us an account of Gama's trials, and of the storms that he encountered, when he reached the vicinity of the bold promontory that no European had hitherto sailed past. Gama fancied that he here saw the Spirit of the Cape, appearing to him in a fearful cloud that suddenly enveloped his tempest-tossed vessels, and struck terror into the hearts of the sailors, who demanded his immediate return.

The poet Camoens, in one of his most beautiful descriptions, represents the apparition as threatening the bold mariner with dire disasters—to be visited upon the Portuguese nation, also—if he should press forward into the unknown seas beyond. (351)

Finally, in an appendix there is a brief sketch of Camões, which reads:

CAMOENS, Luis de, the most celebrated of Portuguese poets,—b. 1524, d. in 1579. He lived and died in poverty, but after his death he was called the Portuguese Apollo, Camoens the Great; a monument was erected to his memory, and medals were struck in his honor. (493)

One last bit of comparative accounting. Here is how Camões measures up quantitatively with the other writers represented in the volume. With four quotations, Camões is quoted twice as often as Dr. Johnson, John Milton, and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, one more time than Samuel Taylor Coleridge, exactly the same number of times as Leigh Hunt, and only one under

Shakespeare with his five, and two fewer than Alexander Pope or John Greenleaf Whittier. His Continental contemporary Torquato Tasso, however, appears only once, as do Alfred Lord Tennyson, Petrarch and Virgil. As might be expected, Lord Byron is in a class by himself. He leads everyone else with thirteen appearances.

2.

Tucked away in a notebook is Walt Whitman's entry on Luis de Camões: "Camoens, a Portuguese, contemporary of Tasso, Italian. C's poem on the first discovery of East Indies by Vasco da Gama."⁴ This note suggests that Camões's *Os Lusíadas*, probably in William Julius Mickle's eighteenth-century translation, is the main source for his lines on Vasco da Gama and the Portuguese in the poem "Passage to India":⁵

The plans, the voyages again, the expeditions,
Again Vasco de Gama sails forth,
Again the knowledge gain'd, the mariner's compass

* * *

He shall indeed pass the straits and conquer
the mountains,
he shall double the Cape of Good Hope to some purpose

* * *

The traders, rulers, explorers, Moslems, Venetians,
Byzantium, the Arabs, Portuguese

3.

In 1815, in *The Round Table*, the English essayist William Hazlitt continued the neo-classical period's familiar complaint about Camões's employment of ancient deities in his Modern epic. "We will not go so far as to defend Camoens," writes Hazlitt,

⁴ Walt Whitman, *Notebooks and Unpublished Prose Manuscripts, Volume I: Family Notes and Autobiography*, ed. Edward F. Grier, in *The Collected Writings of Walt Whitman*, ed. Gay Wilson Allen and Sculley Bradley et al (New York: New York University, 1984), 221.

⁵ Walt Whitman, "Passage to India," in *Complete Poetry and Selected Prose*, ed. James E. Miller, Jr. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1959), pp. 288-89.

“who, in his Lusiad, makes Jupiter send Mercury with a dream to propagate the Catholic religion.”

4.

I have now examined three numbered copies of a seldom encountered and greatly modified edition of Lord Strangford's Love Poems from the Portuguese of Luis de Camoens/ by Lord Viscount Strangford, “Privately reprinted” in 1866, in an impression “limited to one hundred copies,” the copies in this edition run to 116 pages.

Two of the copies I have examined are in library collections: the first at Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, New York, and the second at the Biblioteca Nacional of Lisbon. The third copy, a recent acquisition, is in my possession. All three copies are numbered. The copy at Vassar College is 52, the one in the Biblioteca Nacional 39, and the one in my possession 71. Number 71 is inscribed: “To Mr. John T. Doyle,/ from his friend/ B. B. Haggin/ Oct. 19th 1886.” Haggin seems to have been responsible for this “private” edition.

This edition, a selection of the poems originally published by Strangford, omits “Remarks on the Life and Writings of Camoens,” Strangford’s long and highly influential introductory essay. It also bears a new dedication. Strangford’s original dedication reads:

To Denham Jephson, Esq. M.P.
&c, &c, &c.
In Testimony of Grateful Attachment,
The Following Pages are Inscribed,
By
His Affectionate Kinsman,
The Translator.

The dedication in the volume at Vassar College reads:

To Lord Viscount Strangford

* * * * *

“Those madrigals of breath divine,
Which Camoens’ harp from Rapture stole
And gave, all glowing warm, to thine.”
—Moore.

Thomas Moore's lines are quoted from "To Lord Viscount Strangford (Aboard the Phaeton Frigate, off the Azores, by moonlight)," a poem published in Moore's Poems Relating to America (1806), a scant three years following the first publication of Strangford's translations in London. In this connection, it will be recalled, that Lord Byron, in "English Bards and Scotch Reviewers" (1809), wrote of Strangford: "Think'st thou to gain thy verse a higher place/ By dressing Camoens in a suit of lace?" (lines 303-04) While of the very lines quoted in the dedication to Love Poems, he wrote: "Let MOORE still sigh; let STRANGFORD steal from MOORE,/ And swear that CAMOENS sang such notes of yore" (lines 921-22). Byron's charge that Moore was implicated in Strangford's work on Camões did not originate with him. Monica Letzring, a keen student of Camões literary reputation and influence in England, puts the matter aptly and succinctly:

There was apparently some question of whether or not Moore had assisted in the translations. The poems, as [Thomas] Medwin said, 'are very Moorish.' This 'Moorishness' had not gone unnoticed by others. Jeffrey in the Edinburgh Review had particularly objected to Strangford's dressing Camoens 'in the meretricious ornaments of Mr. Little's school.' And Byron, in 'English Bards and Scotch Reviewers,' advised him not to 'teach the Lusian bard to copy Moore.' [Robert] Southey found Strangford's writing in 'the purest manner of Little Moore.' And later in the century Richard Francis Burton, the most prolific of Camoens' translators, [writing in 1881,] found in Strangford's versions 'the fatal Irish fluency, the flowery fruitless Hibernian facility which culminated in Thomas Moore.' The charges of 'Moorishness' and licentiousness were not infrequently connected, for example, by Jeffrey.⁶

The quotation from Moore on the page dedicating Love Poems to Strangford (already an odd dedication since the book is comprised of Strangford's own translations) cannot help but recall the old questions (rekindled only five years earlier by Burton) about Moore's possible contribution to Poems, from the

⁶ Monica Letzring, "Strangford's Poems from The Portuguese of Luis de Camoens," Comparative Literature, 23 (Fall 1971), pp. 293-94.

Portuguese of Luis de Camoens and Strangford's own putative originality as a translator-poet.

My notion, finally, is that in paring down Strangford's original collection of translations from Camões to those poems that might be called "love poems," the volume's unnamed editor was following the famous example of Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Her love sonnets first saw print in an edition "not for publication" that was prepared by "Miss Mitford" in 1847 as Sonnets by E. B. B., followed by incorporation as Sonnets from the Portuguese in the two-volume Poems of Elizabeth Barrett Browning published by Chapman and Hall, in London in 1850. Influenced herself by Strangford's translations of Camões (see, especially, her poem "Catarina to Camoens"), Elizabeth Barrett Browning is said to have allowed her poet husband to give her sonnet sequence its collective title. Robert Browning, who owned a copy of Strangford's Poems, from the Portuguese of Luis de Camoens, seems to have modeled the title on Strangford's.⁷ If Love Poems is meant to evoke Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Sonnets, the matter is brought rather neatly to full circle.

⁷ The Browning Collections: A Reconstruction With Other Memorabilia, compiled by Philip Kelley and Betty A. Coley (Winfield, Kansas: Armstrong Browning Library of Baylor University, The Browning Institute, Mansell Publishing Limited, and Wedgestone press, 1984), p. 49. It is noted that Browning's signature of ownership appears on the flyleaf of his copy of Strangford's Poems from The Portuguese.