

Poetry

CRITICISM

VOLUME

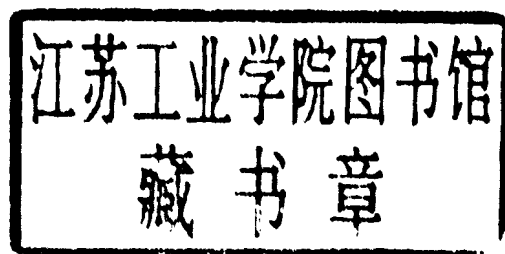
31

Poetry Criticism

*Excerpts from Criticism of the Works
of the Most Significant and Widely
Studied Poets of World Literature*

Volume 31

Ellen McGeagh
Editor



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Preface

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- The **Author Heading** cites the name under which the author most commonly wrote, followed by birth and death dates. Also located here are any name variations under which an author wrote, including transliterated forms for authors whose native languages use nonroman alphabets. If the author wrote consistently under a pseudonym, the pseudonym will be listed in the author heading and the author's actual name given in parenthesis on the first line of the biographical and critical introduction. Uncertain birth or death dates are indicated by question marks. Single-work entries are preceded by the title of the work and its date of publication.
- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author and the critical debates surrounding his or her work.
- A **Portrait of the Author** is included when available.
- The list of **Principal Works** is ordered chronologically by date of first publication and lists the most important works by the author. The first section comprises poetry collections and book-length poems. The second section gives information on other major works by the author. For foreign authors, the editors have provided original foreign-language publication information and have selected what are considered the best and most complete English-language editions of their works.
- Reprinted **Criticism** is arranged chronologically in each entry to provide a useful perspective on changes in critical evaluation over time. All individual titles of poems and poetry collections by the author featured in the entry are printed in boldface type. The critic's name and the date of composition or publication of the critical work are given

at the beginning of each piece of criticism. Unsigned criticism is preceded by the title of the source in which it appeared. Footnotes are reprinted at the end of each essay or excerpt. In the case of excerpted criticism, only those footnotes that pertain to the excerpted texts are included.

- Critical essays are prefaced by brief **Annotations** explicating each piece.
- A complete **Bibliographical Citation** of the original essay or book precedes each piece of criticism.
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Linden Peach, "Man, Nature and Wordsworth: American Versions," *British Influence on the Birth of American Literature*, (Macmillan Press Ltd., 1982), 29-57; reprinted in *Poetry Criticism*, vol. 20, ed. Ellen McGeagh (Detroit: The Gale Group), 37-40.

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Managing Editor, Literary Criticism Series
The Gale Group
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Luís Vaz de Camões

1524?-1580

(Also transliterated as Camoens) Portuguese poet and playwright.

INTRODUCTION

Author of the epic *Os Lusíadas* (1572; *The Lusiads*), Camões is considered the national poet of Portugal and its greatest lyricist. A glorification of the Portuguese voyages of discovery, *The Lusiads* portrays explorer Vasco da Gama's maritime journey to India using the forms of classical, heroic literature. Camões also wrote numerous pieces of posthumously published lyric poetry, which present his principal theme of the tension between sensual and spiritual love. Many of these are suffused with a deep melancholy rooted in Camões's sufferings while in exile, and are noted for their simplicity, formal excellence, and passionate intensity. In addition to Camões's enormous influence on Portuguese poetry, he also was a minor dramatist who composed three plays, comedies that combine classical and Portuguese dramatic forms.

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

While the veracity of many events in Camões's life is uncertain, he is thought to have been born in Lisbon in 1524 or 1525 into an aristocratic but destitute Galician family. He likely attended the University of Coimbra, there acquiring some of his considerable knowledge of classical literature and philosophy. A member of King John III's court in Lisbon, he was by some accounts banished in 1547 upon discovery of his affair with Caterina de Ataíde, a lady-in-waiting to the queen. Camões then began his military career in North Africa, losing an eye during his tour of duty in Morocco. He returned to Lisbon in 1550, and was pardoned by the king in 1553 after assaulting a royal official in the streets. Camões soon after departed for India as a soldier for the crown. He was subsequently assigned to a post in Macao, serving as trustee of personal effects for the dead and absent. While returning to Goa in western India after being accused of misconduct, Camões was shipwrecked in the Mekong Delta, but managed to save himself and his manuscript of *The Lusiads*. The impoverished Camões then made his way to Mozambique where he was found by the Portuguese historian Diogo do Couto who assisted him in his return to Lisbon. Back in Portugal by 1570, Camões saw his epic published in 1572. That year he also was awarded a royal pension for his service, but was paid only haphazardly. He died June 10, 1580 in Lisbon.



MAJOR WORKS

Camões's lyric poetry consists of numerous pieces in the classical verse forms of eclogue, ode, elegy, and sonnet, as well as purely Portuguese *canções*, *esparsas*, *motos*, and *redondilhas*. Such works range from elegant love lyrics to melancholy expressions of anguish as they demonstrate Camões' theme of the discord between idealized and sensual love. The title of Camões's encyclopedic epic, *The Lusiads*, is taken from the Latin term for Portugal, *Lusitania*. Written in ten cantos of ottava rima, the work invokes the great fifteenth-century journey of Portuguese discovery undertaken by Vasco da Gama, celebrating the glorious deeds and triumphs over nature of this explorer. While it makes prophetic reference to Portuguese history, *The Lusiads* vilifies the commercial aspect of da Gama's venture and attacks the followers of Islam—a religion whose adherents Camões perceived as the principal threat to Christianity. While pursuing a Christian theme of universal love, Camões fills his epic with figures from pagan mythology, placing the fate of da Gama and his men in the hands of the Olympians. With assistance from Venus and

the opposition of Bacchus, the sailors make their way around Africa. Impeded at the Cape of Good Hope by the giant Adamastor, who vows to destroy them upon their return, the Portuguese explorers face violent storms, shipwreck, and war before reaching the object of their quest—landfall in India.

CRITICAL RECEPTION

The appearance of *The Lusiads* in 1572 created something of a sensation, and after Camões's death the publication of his lyric works prompted increasing esteem for the poet. As Camões's poetry began to appear in print, many attempts were made to collect his shorter poems and to exclude those pieces that were apocryphal; a process that continued into the twentieth century. Judging from these works, critics have deemed Camões to be Portugal's finest lyric poet, praising the emotional intensity and virtuosity of his writing. Meanwhile, scholars have continued to view *The Lusiads* as the great epic poem of the Renaissance, perceiving in the work a harmonious balance between Camões's classical allusiveness and the sensual realism of his descriptive language. Still, despite its fame in Portugal, *The Lusiads* is less well-known elsewhere. More recently, critics have acknowledged that *The Lusiads* and other writings by Camões have made a significant impact on a number of English-speaking writers as they continue to exert a considerable influence on the literature of Portugal and Brazil.

PRINCIPAL WORKS

Poetry

Os Lusíadas [*The Lusiads*] 1572
Rhythmas de Luís de Camões [*Camoens: The Lyrics*] 1595
 **Rimas* 1645
Poems from the Portuguese of Luís de Camões 1803
Obras completas. 5 vols. 1946-47
Collected Poems 1957

Other Major Works

Auto dos Enfatiões (drama) 1587
Auto de Filodemo (drama) 1587

*Includes the drama *Auto del-Reí Seleuco*.

CRITICISM

George Edward Woodberry (essay date 1910)

SOURCE: "Camoens," in *The Inspiration of Poetry*, The Macmillan Company, 1910, pp. 58-84.

[In the following essay, Woodberry describes Camões's personality and the degree to which his character and imagination inform *The Lusiads* and his lyric poetry.]

Camoens, the maker of the only truly modern epic, offers an illustration of poetic power which is to me one of the most interesting, although the foreignness of his subject-matter and the extraordinary lameness of its English translations make difficult obstacles to our appreciation; but for that very reason he has the happiest fortune that can fall to a poet in the fact that familiarity ever endears him the more. He is a less pure type of the flame of genius than Marlowe; poetic energy appears in him less a spiritual power dwelling in its own realm of imagination; but, on the other hand, his career admits us to a nearer view of a poet's human life, to what actually befalls the man so doubtfully endowed with that inward passion of life, in the days and weeks and years of his journey. Scarce any poet is so autobiographical in the strict sense. Others have made themselves the subject of their song; but usually, like Shelley, they exhibit an ideal self seen under imaginative lights and through the soul's atmosphere, and in these self-portraits half the lines are aspiration realized, the self they dream of; but Camoens shows in his verse as he was in life, with a naturalness and vigor, with an unconscious realism, a directness, an intensity and openness that give him to us as a comrade.

He was of the old blue blood of the Peninsula, the Gothic blood, the same that gave birth to Cervantes. He was blond, and bright-haired, with blue eyes, large and lively, the face oval and ruddy,—and in manhood the beard short and rounded, with long untrimmed mustachios,—the forehead high, the nose aquiline; in figure agile and robust; in action "quick to draw and slow to sheathe," and when he was young, he writes that he had seen the heels of many, but none had seen his heels. Born about the year 1524, of a noble and well-connected family, educated at Coimbra, a university famous for the classics, and launched in life about the court at Lisbon, he was no sooner his own master than he fell into troubles. He was a lover born, and the name of his lady, Caterina, is the first that emerges in his life; for such Romeo-daring he was banished from court when he was about twenty, whether after a duel or a stolen interview is uncertain; and on his return, since he continued faithful to his lady, he was sent into Africa, and in an engagement with pirates in the Straits of Gibraltar he lost his right eye. He fought the Moors for three years until he was twenty-five, and returning to Lisbon, enlisted for the Indies; but in consequence of a street affair with swords in which he drew in defence of some masked ladies and unfortunately wounded a palace servant, he was held in prison three years. Eleven days after his release he sailed, and it is not unlikely that his sailing was a condition of his release. He rounded the Cape of Good Hope and came to India, where he served in campaigns and garrison, and occasionally held official appointments, and from time to time fell into prison. He cleared himself from all charges of wrong-doing in office; but he was of the type that makes both enemies and friends. He was outspoken, and he in-

dulged his mood in satire, a dangerous employment in the narrowness of colonial and army life. On the other hand, he was a brave and gentle comrade and delighted in manly traits; and so there was a round of companions in arms to whom he was dear. He served far and wide, fought on the coasts of the Red Sea, wintered in Ormuz in the Persian Gulf, spent some years in China, and seems to have visited the Malay islands; once he was shipwrecked on the Chinese coast. It is clear that he roamed the Orient on all the lines of travel and enterprise, of commerce and war, wherever the Portuguese ships could sail, and bore throughout the name and character of a gentleman-adventurer of that world, a daring, enterprising, hopeful, unfortunate, and often distressed man.

Sixteen years of his manhood passed in these toils,—

In one hand aye the Sword, in one the Pen,

—along the tropical seas and under the alien skies; for from the first, even before in his youth he planted a lance in Africa, he had held to his breast that little manuscript book where year by year, on the deck and the gun-breech, in his grotto at Macao, in prison, wherever he might be and under whatever aspect of fortune, he wrote down the growing lines of that poem which is now the chief glory of his native land. When he was shipwrecked in China, he lost the little store of gold that he had accumulated in the office which he was recalled from, but he held safe this book,—

In his embrace the song that swam to land
From sad and piteous shipwreck dripping wet
'Scaped from the reefs and rocks that fang the
strand.

Now, after sixteen years, nostalgia, not simple homesickness, but the nostalgia of him who fares forth into the world and voyages long in stranger-lands, had fallen on him, and was heavy in all his spirit. He had left Portugal, indignantly saying that his country should not possess his bones; but he had long changed this temper,—

Tagus yet pealeth with the passion caught
From the wild cry he flung across the sea;—

all his hopes had really rested on the honor of the song he had built up for the glory of Portugal, and while everything else that men name success faded away and escaped him, with this poem surely he would find welcome home. He stopped at Mozambique with the captain governor, and when he wished to continue his voyage, this officer, who was his host, consigned him to prison for a debt due himself, a small sum. Soon afterwards, however, a ship came by, with a dozen of Camoens' old messmates and friends, veterans, and they contributed the money for his release. So, says the old biographer, "were simultaneously sold the person of Camoens and the honor of Pedro Barreto" for £25. With these friends Camoens sailed homeward, and arrived safely, but not to find prosperity. It was three years before his book was published; and he received for reward

only a pension of about one hundred dollars in our money at its present worth, and this was not often paid. The entire eight years of his life at Lisbon were filled with such poverty and distress as we remember of the last dying days of Spenser and Chatterton. He lived some part of this time in a religious house, that is, an alms-house; at other times his Javanese servant, who had stayed with him, begged food for him at night, but the faithful servant died before his wretched master. Even among the poets few have been so homeless and destitute as Camoens in his life's end, now going about on crutches and suffering the last sad effects of a hard-faring life. It was the moment just before his death when the power of Portugal was extinguished on the battle-field by Philip of Spain: "I die," he wrote to a friend, "not only in my country, but with it." The time of his death is uncertain, but he was about fifty-five years old. He died in a hospital. "I saw him die," says an old Carmelite brother, "in the hospital of Lisbon, without a sheet where-with to cover himself." Such in its external events was the life-story of Camoens.

If one throws upon this harsh narrative the light that flows from Camoens' poetry, the lines are softened in the retrospect; the hardship and misfortune are seen in that atmosphere of melancholy that pervades his strong verse and blends with it, as tenderness companions valor in the man himself. To see properly the phases of his genius, one should glance first at the lyrical works, and especially the sonnets, that preceded and accompanied the heroic verse of the epic. From his student days at the university, unlike Marlowe, he was the heir of a developed art, and in all his work is seen the fair background of the poetic tradition,—in the epic the forms of old mythology, and in the lyrics the Italian example of Petrarch. To him his lady Caterina was what Petrarch's Laura had been, an ideal of hopeless and pure passion. Her personality is not definitely known, but she married and died while still young. Though in his sonnets to her Camoens followed the poetic tradition, the reality of his devotion cannot be doubted in its inception; and in its continuance through the years of his youth, and especially of his long exile in the Orient, this ideal passion stood for him, at least, as the sign and certainty of his first failure—his failure in love. It became, perhaps, after long and hopeless years simply the cry of his imagination, but it had its original being in the call of the heart. Very sweet and noble, though conventional, is his early pleading:—

Beautiful eyes, whereof the sunny sphere
When most with cloudless clarity of light
The infinite expanse he maketh bright,
Doubting to be eclipsed, doth stand in fear:
If I am held in scorn who hold you dear,
Then, having of all things such perfect sight,
Consider this thing too, that mortal night
To cover up your beauty draweth near.
Gather, O gather with unstaying hand,
The fruits that must together gathered be,
Occasion ripe, and Passion's clasp divine.
And, since by you I live and die, command
Love, that he yield his tribute unto me,
Who unto you have freely yielded mine.

After years of vain castle-building during which he seemed his "own sorrow's architect," and in that wide roaming which he describes,—

Now scattering my music as I pass,
The world I range,—

he still kept true to the lover's creed:—

All evils Love can wreak behold in me,
In whom the utmost of his power malign
He willed unto the world to manifest:
But I, like him, would have these things to be.
Lifted by woe to ecstasy divine,
I would not change for all the world possess.

When his lady died, he lifted his prayer in his loveliest and most famous sonnet:—

Soul of my soul, that didst so early wing
From our poor world thou heldest in disdain,
Bound be I ever to my mortal pain,
So thou hast peace before the Eternal King!
If to the realms where thou dost soar and sing
Remembrance of aught earthly may attain,
Forget not the deep love thou did'st so fain
Discover my fond eyes inhabiting.
And if my yearning heart unsatisfied,
And pang on earth incurable have might
To profit thee and me, pour multiplied
Thy meek entreaties to the Lord of Light,
That swiftly He would raise me to thy side,
As suddenly He rapt thee from my sight.

In these sonnets and other lyrical poems the poet is hardly more personal than in the heroic epic, but his personality is more exclusively felt, and the topics are not confined to his love. The most lasting impression made is of the passing of hope out of his life. Camoens was one of those souls who are great in hope; and he often bent upon the past reverted eyes, and drew the sum of his losses, ending in that refrain—

For Death and Disenchantment all was made—
Woe unto all that hope! to all that trust!

The vein of melancholy in the lyrical poems opens the tenderness of Camoens, and perhaps the softer note is somewhat overcharged in these admirable but rather Italianated versions of Dr. Garnett's that I have used; life-weariness and profound discouragement, indeed, there is in them; but they are not the simple outflow of a Petrarchan lover's complaint, but the sorrows of a much-toiling man; for Camoens was both sailor and soldier, and as natural to those ways of labor as to the handling of the lute. The voyage, the march, and the battle made up the larger part of his life.

This opens the second trait to be observed in the phases of his development, namely, his absorption of the patriotic vitality of his country. It is true that he inherited a developed and conventionalized art, and had always that fair background of classical figures and Italian atmosphere which

were his portion of the Renaissance; but the Renaissance was rather like a little mountain city where he was born and drank his youth; he did not abide there, but came down into the great modern world that was then to be,—the world of the waste of waters and the spreading empires. Portugal played a great part in that age which broke the horizon bars and passed the western and the eastern limit of the sun alike, and made the fleets as free of the ocean as the sea-birds of every wandering wave. Camoens was to make this the great theme of his song,—the ocean fame of Portugal. But he was inducted into his passion of patriotism by natural ways, before the glory of the ocean discoveries was fully opened in his mind. Portugal, you remember, was the child of battle, born of the conflict of the Christian and the Moor; on the stricken field she found her crown itself, and became a state; and in maintaining the struggle that drove the Crescent back into Africa, and in following across the straits to free the seaboard, she developed her strength, laid up her most heroic memories, and built those navies that were to open and command so many seas.

When Camoens in his youth fought his first campaigns in Africa, he was united with his country's cause and honor in its great historic current, and it was by nature that there flamed up in him that national pride, hating and triumphing over the Moor, which is the historic substance of his epic. He had found his theme in battling with the Moorish power. The realization of this theme, the patriotic past of his country, was the second phase of his development. Then came, with his long and perilous voyage and his years of wanderings through all the picturesque coasts of the East, that expansion and enrichment of his theme which reduced the original Moorish battle to the rank of episode and background, while the maritime greatness of Portugal, set forth in the story of the voyage of Da Gama round the Cape of Good Hope as the main action, became the more prominent subject. The poem itself yields these three main elements corresponding to the division that has been made: the background of classical mythology, which affords the mechanism of the plot, and is of the Renaissance; the history of Portugal which affords the time perspectives and the main episodes; and lastly the fortunes of Da Gama. The poem thus grew with Camoens' own growth, and contains his artistic training in the school of Renaissance tradition, his youthful African marches and raids, and his manhood voyages. He made it embrace the whole glory of Portugal, compressed into its stanzas all her romance, heroism, and fable from the earliest record in antique days to his own hour, spread in it the naval dominion of her great contemporary age; and he did this, not as a reminiscent scholar in Virgil's way or Tasso's way, but as one who had labored in the glorious action by sea and land, near the port and far in the open, boy and man, with sword and pen. The enthusiasm of a lifetime here gathers and gives out the passion of a whole nation and makes a people's glory one with the poet's fame. The *Lusiads* is the principal monument of Portugal, and the chief national bond that binds her children in one.

It is this infusion of personality—and personality like Marlowe's of the daring Renaissance type—which makes the *Lusiads* so different from all other epics. The theme is not presented as an ideal action in remote time after the manner of other poets, but seems a real event, something that the poet had done and been. It is as if Ulysses had written the *Odyssey*. Camoens was himself, like Ulysses, such a traveller, a romantic wanderer, a hard-toiling man, in the heroic exile of enterprise on the sea-edges of a larger and unknown world. It is this temperament of the wanderer that so endears him to all nomad souls. It is this which made him attractive to Captain Burton, for example, who made the labor of translating his works a part of his task for twenty years; and though it is marvellously unreadable, it is from this translation that I shall quote; for at times, and not seldom, he catches the spirit of Camoens as the sail catches the wind. The *Lusiads* is a sea-poem. No poem approaches it in maritime quality except the *Odyssey*. The note of the whole is struck in Da Gama's account of the setting sail of the fleet from Lisbon:—

We from the well-known port went sorrowing,
After the manner of far-faring men.

The fleet made out to sea, and this is the parting view:—

Slow, ever slower, banisht from our eyne,
Vanisht our native hills, astern remaining;
Remained dear Tagus, and the breezy line
Of Cintran peaks, long, long, our gaze detaining;
Remain'd eke in that dear country mine
Our hearts, with pangs of memory ever paining;
Till, when all veiled sank in darkling air,
Naught but the welkin and the wave was there.

The sense not only of the deep sea, as in this last line, but of the undiscovered, is constantly present,—not only the illimitable waste of waters, but the peril of them. It is a growing peril, vaguely felt at first beside the new islands and capes lately discovered, in the strangeness of the coasts by which the ships drop southward, in the adventures with the unfamiliar tribes at the landfalls; but the strangeness becomes peril, slowly and surely,—that panic fear which is not for a moment of alarm but for days and nights of increasing dread—the mood which all great explorers have known, from Columbus to the latest, who have had to master their men with the desperate force of a higher courage and hold them to the onward course. It is this gigantic fear, rising from the endless rolling of the sea and driving of the cloudy winds in the pathless ways of the lonely sail,—it is this fear that Camoens gives body and a name in the most daring and perhaps the most celebrated of the inventions of his fancy,—the apparition of the giant phantom, Adamastor, off the Cape of Good Hope. Adamastor symbolizes the dangers of the ocean enterprise and the revenge of the elements outraged by the human victory over their brute power.

What Camoens there renders by imagination and allegory he draws again realistically in the account of the storm in the Indian Ocean. The storm in Shakespeare's *Tempest* is

the only sea-storm that compares with it for majesty and violence, and at the same time for truth to sea-weather. The little picture of the night-watch on deck with which the scene opens gives perhaps in briefest space that unaffected naturalism which distinguishes Camoens' descriptions of actuality:—

All half-numbered and chill
Shivered with many a yawn the huddling crew
Beneath the bulging mainsail, cloth'd ill
To bear the nightly breath that keenly blew;
Their eyes kept open sore against their will
They rubbed and stretched their torpid limbs anew,—

and to keep awake they begin to spin yarns; in this case the fine chivalric tale of the Twelve of England—in the course of which the storm breaks on them with tropic suddenness.

The labor of the life is thus a main element in the poem, which is solid with experience and sombre with it, also. Camoens delighted in his companions, those vassals of the king, "peerless in their worth," but it is the darker side of their lives that holds his imagination and memory alike:—

Look how they gladly wend by many a way:—
Self-doomed to sleepless night and foodless day,
To fire and steel, shaft-shower, and bullet-flight;
To torrid Tropics, Arctics froze and gray,
The Pagan's buffet and the Moor's despite;
To risks invisible, threatening human life,
To wreck, sea-monsters and the wave's wild strife.

The lonely death in a foreign land, always near in the prospect, imparts a deep melancholy to the verse, that true epic melancholy, which Virgil summed in that one of his most immortal lines where the dying soldier "remembers sweet Argos." Camoens was a man of friendships, of that comradeship which flowers only in such hardy soil, and many of his verses lament the untimely death of the brave heart in its youth. One sonnet on the death of a comrade in Africa, in the form of an epitaph spoken by the victim, best tells the story:—

Few years and evil to my life more lent,
All with hard toil and misery replete:
Light did so swiftly from my eyes retreat,
That ere five lustres quite were gone, I went.
Ocean I roamed and isle and continent,
Seeking some remedy for life unsweet;
But he whom Fortune will not frankly meet,
Vainly by venture wooes her to his bent.
First saw I light in Lusitanian land,
Where Alemquer the blooming nurtured me;
But, feeble foul contagion to withstand,
I feed the fish's maw where thou, rude sea,
Lashest the churlish Abyssinian strand,
Far from my Portugal's felicity.

The same mood, in the *Lusiads*, fills the stanza which he dedicates to the memory of all who fell by the wave and along the trail:—

At last in tangled brake and unknown ground
Our true companions lost for aye we leave,

Who mid such weary ways, such dreary round,
Such dread adventures, aidance ever gave.
How easy for man's bones a grave is found!
Earth's any wrinkle, ocean's any wave,
Whereso the long home be, abroad, at home,
For every hero's corse may lend a tomb.

Camoens is always directly faithful to the daily and hourly life, to the physical scene and the human manners; but his truth to the heroic spirit, the martial breath that filled the sails of the great enterprise, and also his truth to the sentiment of the wanderer, the power whereby he renders the melancholy which falls from the dry and sterile Arabian peaks of rose-red rock, diffusing that nostalgia of the brave heart, heightening all that bravery so, and thereby renews for us, and illumines, that old type of the "much-enduring" man,—all this constitutes a truth for which reality seems but a faint and shadowy name. It is the truth not merely of a voyage, but of man's life on earth,—such as it is when poetry presents it most nobly, most feelingly, and without a veil. To Camoens the fortune of human life showed no smiling face; it was not in fortune but in character that he found life's value. He was a lover of heroic men, those

By the doughty arm and sword that chase
Honor which man may proudly hail his own;
In weary vigil, in the steely case,
'Mid wrathsome winds and bitter billows thrown,
Suff'ring the frigid rigors in th' embrace
Of South, and regions lorn, and lere, and lone;
Swallowing the tainted rations' scanty dole,
Salted with toil of body, moil of soul.

The character of Da Gama is very nobly drawn; he is all that such a leader should be; a figure worthy of his place in the poem, and of the fame to which he is exalted, akin to Æneas before him and to Tasso's Godfrey who was born after him. Camoens' morality, his conception of the character of "a good king, a great captain, a wise councillor, a just judge, a pure priest," as Burton draws the catalogue, is always energetic and lofty. Of all his personal qualities he is most proud of his own independence in judgment, his honesty of speech, his perfect and entire fearlessness. He returns repeatedly to this claim of truth-telling, which he thought was his duty as a part of his fidelity to the Muses; and when he invokes their aid, he makes this his main plea:—

Aid me you only:—long indeed sware I
No grace to grant where good doth not prevail,
And none to flatter, whatso their degrees
On pain of losing all my power to please.

In telling the story of Portugal, past and present, he had much occasion to use this high ideal; not even in those days did he hesitate to denounce and inveigh within the pale of the Church itself. Morality, in the high sense of character, pervades the poem; virtue, in the ancient and manly meaning of the word,—the old epic "arms and the man,"—is its substance, and charm is diffused over it as in the *Æneid*. This charm partly arises from that oriental coloring—the *lux ex Oriente*—natural to the scene, in the de-

tail of which, Burton says, Camoens rarely trips, being more accurate than most modern authors, and that experienced traveller wonders at the quality of the brain that amassed so much information from sources so few and so imperfect. The charm, however, lies also in the contrast between the realism of the matter and the fantastic power of Camoens' imagination, which is one of his most powerful and fascinating traits and peculiarly a feature of his originality. The Adamastor episode serves as an example; but a nobler one is the ideal figuring of the rivers Indus and Ganges, who appear like Neptunian forms in the dream of the old king which was one of the motives of the voyage. The variation by which the scenes of pictured history—a tradition of the epic and seen by Æneas, you remember, at Carthage—are here found spread on the banners of the festally decorated Portuguese ships is a happy play of the poet's fancy. The isle of Venus, that receives the homeward-bound fleet, is perhaps the most surprising, as it is certainly the loveliest, of these imaginative fantasies. But it is not by any piecemeal criticism and naming of passages that the quality of this epic can be conveyed.

Yet one must add still another of its larger elements, namely, its spaciousness. I mean the map of the world, like that map I read from *Tamburlaine*, that it unfolds. Camoens describes the European quarter early in the poem, beginning from Russia and sweeping southward and west, leaving England entirely out as if it were Iceland of to-day, and finding, of course, in the little state of Portugal the climax and summit of the world. It is a perspective to which our thoughts are unused, but in its day was not an untrue one; and for us to have it in mind—to emigrate into it, as it were—is a prerequisite to the appreciation of the *Lusiads*, for such was Camoens' world. He also describes the voyaging of the fleet with great detail. But it is in the last book of the poem that the face of the new earth is shown, magically in the mystic globe of the planetary sphere, to Da Gama by the Siren: that new earth, fresh as it then arose from the uncovered waters,—the Asian seas and continent and islands, the African coasts and uplands, and the unknown west far as through Magellan's Straits; it is a wide reach, a finer vision than Milton gave from the specular mount, and with it as in its own horizons the epic ends.

The *Lusiads* is the only truly modern epic, but one seems to breathe in it the early air of the *Odyssey* and *Iliad* more than in any intervening poem; like the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, it has no love element in its plot, but the old heroic life—man's life of the oar-blade and the battle-field—rules the scene. The sense of primitive life, however, is still deeper-seated, in its neighborhood to nature, where the sky is the tent of the bivouac and the roof of the deck-watch, and man is a solitary figure in the landscape, and life a hand-to-hand affair. Into that far alien field of earth and waters the pride of Portugal is carried, as it were, on the banners of a little squadron conquering a mighty world. It was fitting in the Peninsular war that the regiments of Portugal went into battle with lines of Camoens inscribed

upon their flags. Yet it is a narrow view that would see in the *Lusiads* only the self-glorification of a little state. It has a larger significance. The blending of the East and West at a great dawn of history is here rendered in a noble form of human greatness, cast in the lives of a few brave men equal to great tasks.

Such are a few of the traits of this epic. But what a fiery soul must that have been which could carry such a passion of poetry through the years of exile and ever cherish it as a life above life itself! The deep melancholy of Camoens, as it gathered in later years, is plain; his failure in love—the hunger of the heart that was never to be appeased with any earthly touch of the ideal—was but the sign of the famine that fell upon him in all the ways of success. He had no talent for success. He was filled with poet's blood, as the pure grape with wine. He was wild and free, amorous, framed for enjoyment, Southern-hearted, a boon comrade, a tender friend; between the prison and the camp and the ship's deck he had a soldier's gayety, was fond of fine apparel and of golden suppers,—the adventurer's change-fortune; but failure was all he found in the East, and the profound discouragement of his lot invaded his heart at last. He reviewed his life in one of his last sonnets.

In lowly cell, bereaved of liberty,
Error's meet recompense, long time I spent;
Then o'er the world disconsolate I went,
Bearing the broken chain that left me free;
My life I gave unto this memory;
No lesser sacrifice would Love content;
And poverty I bore and banishment;
So it was ordered, so it had to be.
Content with little, though I knew indeed
Content unworthy, yet, aloof from strife,
I loved to mark Man's various employ.
But my disastrous star, whom now I read,
Blindness of death, and doubtfulness of life,
Have made me tremble when I see a joy.

The passing of hope out of his life was the history of his soul. He came home only to make disaster sure, as the event proved. Sick, old with wounds, the almshouse gave him to the hospital, and the hospital to the grave, as a corpse is cast from wave to wave till it sinks into a nameless tomb. It seems—it is—pitiful.

Woe unto all that hope! to all that trust!—

it is the epitaph of most of the poets. Yet it is from the consuming flame of such a passion and power of life as burnt in this much-enduring soul that poetic genius gives out its immortal star.

Sir Edmund Gosse (essay date 1925)

SOURCE: "Camoens," in *Silhouettes*, William Heinemann, Ltd., 1925, pp. 33-9.

[In the following essay, Gosse summarizes the life of Camões: "Portugal's greatest national author."]

Persistent industry of research has not enabled Portuguese scholarship to fix the exact date of the birth of Portugal's greatest national author, but there seems little doubt that the year was 1524. We were therefore at liberty to celebrate the fourth centenary whenever we pleased, so that it does not slip our memory until after last December. Mr. Aubrey Bell—whose admirable studies in Portuguese, or (as we used to say) in the Portingall, language cannot be too warmly praised—marked the moment by publishing a succinct biography of the poet, which tells us all that is certainly known about him. This is an occasion for recollecting Froude's delicious impertinence about the Cornish saint, of whom he recounted "all we know, and more than all, yet nothing to what the angels know."

No writer has been, it appears, the victim of more fairytales than Camoens, and these are impatiently brushed aside by Mr. Aubrey Bell. But when all that is merely legend or fiction is cleared away, we are left feeling that the life of the author of *The Lusiads* must have been romantic far beyond the wont of literary lives. The spirit of the great navigators was in him; he wandered in Africa and Asia; he was a soldier and a lover and a sailor on the grand scale. He lived abreast of the heroic age of adventure. He was still a youth when King Manoel I. assumed the title Lord of the Conquest, Navigation and Commerce of India, Ethiopia, Arabia, and Persia. Camoens belonged to that epoch of empire; he did not merely sum it up in immortal verse, but he fought and suffered in the pulse and flood of it. His life is like a gateway in some stupendous piece of Manoelian architecture, such as the startled tourist sees to-day at Batalha or Thomar.

It seems strange that we know little that is positive about the career of a writer so famous and so representative as Camoens. Sir Richard Fanshawe, who was no mean writer of verse, put into the poet's mouth this summary:—

Spain gave me noble birth; Coimbra arts,
Lisbon a high-placed love and courtly parts;
Afric a refuge when the Court did frown;
War, at an eye's expense, a fair renown;
Travel experience, with no short sight
Of India and the world.

Mr. Bell will not hear of Spanish birth. The Galician family of the poet's ancestor, Vasco Perez de Camoens, had been settled in Portugal for upwards of a century and a half. The birth is claimed by Santarem and by Lisbon and by Coimbra, and Mr. Bell's arguments, expanded at great length, tend to make the last conjecture the most probable. The earliest editor of Camoens' lyrics roundly declared that "he was born in this our city of Coimbra." The visitor to that ancient and romantic university, the centre of Portuguese learning, likes to think that the author of *The Lusiads* saw the light in one of these terraced streets which still rise so elegantly over the curved waters of the Mondego. It is even more certain that he was educated in that Western Athens, where it is highly likely that he attended the lectures of the shining and acid Scottish exile, George Buchanan. It is believed that in 1543 the young poet left Coimbra for Lisbon.

In Lisbon, and in a church, on Good Friday, 1544, Camoens first saw Catarina de Ataíde, who was then a lady-in-waiting to the Queen. This lady became to him what Beatrice had been to Dante and Laura to Petrarch. As in those cases, so in the famous Portuguese romance, it is difficult to know how much was personal passion and how much a poet's tribute to the fashion of gallantry. Mr. Bell, however, presents Camoens to us as a sort of Paris, with three Catherinas all ambitious for the apple of immortality. Mrs. Browning—who was particularly interested in Catarina—would have been scandalised:—

When the palace ladies, sitting
Round your gittern, shall have said:—
“Poet, sing those verses written
For the lady who is dead”—
Will you tremble,
Yet dissemble,—
Or sing hoarse, with tears between,
“Sweetest eyes, were ever seen?”

It would have been disconcerting indeed if the poet had been obliged to ask Which of the three ladies do you mean? Mr. Aubrey Bell even distracts us with a fourth, the Infanta Maria, daughter of the formidable King Manoel himself. This may be well enough; but we turn in indignation from a fifth suggestion, that Catarina was a Chinese slave-girl. The poet was doubtless rather light of love. What really matters is that the infatuation, to whomever it was directed, inspired what is, by the unanimous verdict of all good judges, the best lyric poetry written in Portuguese up to the present hour.

The incidents of the next few years are shrouded in a most bewildering obscurity. There is no lack of record, but the stories confute one another to a surprising degree. Set out in the dry light of Mr. Bell's scepticism, they awaken the doubt whether there ever was such a person as Camoens at all, or whether he was not a solar myth. Happily, we can put our feet down firmly on *The Lusiads* as on a solid deck. Suddenly we emerge from among the floating débris of legend and are in open water. In disgrace with the King, probably about some too impertinent dramatic petulance, Camoens was exiled to Africa in 1547. Here he spent two years as a soldier in the fortress of Ceuta, and here, in a battle with the Moors, he lost an eye. In 1549 he went back to Portugal, and lived for some years in Lisbon as a swashbuckler. He made himself disliked by the ladies, who called him the “One-Eyed Devil,” and at last, during the Corpus Christi procession, he fought a Court official in the street and nearly killed him. This was the end of his rowdy period, for he was thrown into prison for eight months. In these unseemly adventures, Camoens approaches Villon, that rascal of genius. He was released at length on giving a pledge that he would enlist for India, whither, “as one leaving this world for the next,” he did proceed in March, 1553. He went, in his thirtieth year, as a common soldier, pledged for three years' service. He was nearly wrecked in a storm off the Cape of Good Hope, but after six months of hardship he duly arrived at Goa.

Camoens now launched out into such a life of activity in strange places as hardly any other poet has ever conceived possible. The dreamers have enormously outnumbered the doers among the bards of the world. There have been Byron and Agrippa d'Aubigné and the Duke of Montenivoso (formerly Gabriele d'Annunzio). Lamartine is the eminent political exception. In our own circle, the Poet Laureate, greatly daring, sailed away to Ann Arbor in his eightieth year. But, as a rule, the poets have sat beside their nectar, contemplating the panorama of life, but taking no share in it. For Camoens there was no bed of down. Scarcely arrived at Goa, he started on a punitive expedition to the coast of Malabar; presently he helped to scour the Red Sea of pirates; then he hunted Turkish merchant-vessels in the Persian Gulf, he visited Malacca, he explored the Moluccas. No wonder that Mr. Aubrey Bell, though rigidly divesting himself of all credulous enthusiasm, cannot help exclaiming: “It is really extraordinary that, just as Camoens' works embrace the whole of Portugal's history, he should have visited in person almost without exception every part of the Portuguese Empire.” Meantime, he was incessantly writing verses, no doubt the best that were ever composed on the Indian Ocean. Finally, we find him at Macao, in China, writing his epic of Portingall glory in a grotto on the seashore. On the way back, his ship was wrecked at the mouth of the Mekong River in Cambodia. Camoens lost all that he possessed in the world, except those cantos of the *Lusiads* which he had finished at Macao. He describes the incident in the tenth canto of the epic in terms which Fanshawe endeavours to render thus. After describing the Mekong, the poet continues:—

Upon his soft and charitable Brim
The wet and ship-wracked Song receive shall Hee,
Which in a lamentable plight shall swim
From shoals and Quicksands of tempestuous Sea.

The exhausted poet, clutching his manuscript, landed on the shore of “Cauchinchina,” in a grove that “smelt hot of Calambuco wood,” where Buddhist priests took pity on his parlous condition.

His adventures were not ended, but they must be pursued in his biographies. He was finally imprisoned at Mozambique, of all places in the world, and accidentally succoured there by literary friends, who paid his debts and brought him home to Lisbon. In 1572 he succeeded in publishing his *Lusiads*, and the fame of it spread through Europe. The splendid “Aminta” of Torquato Tasso was printed in the same year, and compliments passed between the Italian and the Portuguese poets, the two most eminent writers of the day. Camoens does not seem to have been known in England, where Shakespeare was a child at Stratford, but he was famous in Spain, where some of his poems were published in Castilian. Lope de Vega, like Shakespeare, was an infant, but we can “place” Camoens by remembering that Cervantes was his younger contemporary. The end of all the brilliant adventures was sad enough. Camoens died of the plague, in abject poverty, in 1579, and the stray note of a Spanish Carmelite monk has preserved the only record of the event. That is what Fray

José Indio wrote: "How grievous to see so great a genius brought so low! I saw him die in a hospital at Lisbon, without so much as a sheet to cover him, after having won success in India and sailed 5,500 leagues of sea." The preservation of this note in a copy of the *Lusiads* now belonging to Lord Ilchester is in itself a romantic tale, fully told by Mr. Bell in his appendix.

Although the *Lusiads* is one of the most famous poems of all literature, it is not really well known in this country. The editions, commentaries, criticisms, and general effusions which Portuguese scholars have expended on Camoens seem to be innumerable. He is the one great intellectual glory of their country. But, in English, there is no really standard edition. Sir Richard Fanshawe's rough and spirited version, a handsome folio of 1655, has never been reprinted; Mickle's, of 1776, gives no real impression of the poem. Sir Richard Burton produced a harsh translation, said to be accurate, but very difficult to read. J. J. Aubertin's rendering, line by line, is much more satisfactory. It would be an excellent thing for some young English poet to devote himself to a version of the *Lusiads*, which is not very long for an epic, not half so long as the "Jerusalem Delivered." What is wanted would be the power to transfer to English the mingled vigour and voluptuousness of the Portuguese. When Camoens describes what appear to be the Azores, this is how Fanshawe transfers the landscape:—

A thousand gallant Trees to Heav'n up-shoot
With Apples Odoriferous and faire;
The Orange-tree hath in her sightly fruit
The colour Daphne boasted in her Haire;
The Citron-tree bends almost to her Root
Under the yellow burthen which she bare;
The goodly Lemmons with their button-Caps,
Hang, imitating Virgin's fragrant Paps.

The savage-trees (That doeth Forest there
With leavie Haire innoble and adorn)
Are, Poplars of Alcides; Laurels, deare
In vain into the Golden God Unshorn;
Myrtles of Venus; the proud Pine severe,
That Cybele for meaner love did scorn;
The speared Cypress, from this vale of Vice,
Stands pointing at Celestial Paradise.

This was well enough in 1655, but a stout young Georgian would do better in 1925.

Leonard Bacon (review date 1946)

SOURCE: A review of *Os Lusíadas*, in *Saturday Review of Literature*, Vol. 29, No. 23, June 8, 1946, pp. 42-3.

[In the following review of *The Lusiads*, Bacon surveys Camões's life and highlights those elements of the poem that will appeal to modern tastes.]

This noble edition of the noble Portuguese epic [*Os Lusíadas*] in the original is the crowning work of one of the

greatest of Romance language scholars. Professor [J. D. M.] Ford, who has already edited Sir Richard Fanshawe's fine seventeenth-century translation of the poem, must feel that he has done good service to literature and to mankind. And what more can a learned man desire? No doubt there will be the usual jeering from the testy race of critics. Slips are inevitable and will be pointed out with pleasure by persons who do not expose themselves by undertaking the enormously difficult. Judgments and testes differ, and there may be matter for controversy. But this book sets a splendid capstone on a fine career.

"I will not go so far as to defend Camoes," said Hazlitt rather turgidly—I forget against what, nor does it greatly matter. The Portuguese poet has no particular need of assistance from that quarter or any other. Changes in taste and opinion leave Camoes untouched. And after nearly four centuries men absorbed in the fashion or doctrine of their own time return to him with an enthusiasm not unlike the passion we feel when we are recaptured by "the Homeric largeness and simplicity." Even Voltaire could see that darkly through the glass of translation. Though we rail against "Old One-Eye's" classical machinery or yawn over his catalogue of viceroys, nevertheless we turn back to Adamastor at the Cape, to Vasco da Gama's landfall at Calicut, to the episode of Ignez de Castro, to the similes of the bull, of the leech, of the lion of Ceuta, and finally to the nobility of spirit, intrinsic in the poem everywhere, even in those places where, like every epic poet, Camoes on occasion nods.

Professor Ford's account of him is brief and good. The cynical paradox, now dwindled to a platitude, that the less is known about a great man the more is written, does not apply. The facts about Camoes are not numerous, the legends are many, and the speculations beyond count. The date of his birth is uncertain, though he was probably born at Lisbon in 1524. His family was noble but poor. He attended the University of Coimbra, where he became a first-rate Latinist, but no one can be sure that he learned Greek. It is supposed that later he had a romantic affair with a lady-in-waiting at the Court of Lisbon and that poverty prevented marriage. But it has also been thought that the hot water he got into at the time suggests a too ambitious passion for a princess and not for a mere lady-in-waiting. Anyhow, he was exiled in 1546 and went as a private soldier to Morocco, where he lost an eye. He appears to have "written great poetry as a habit" at all times and very likely kept up the practice during his banishment. He was permitted to return, but in 1552 he stabbed a dignitary in a brawl. This time he was exiled in a big way, for he was released from prison on condition that he depart to India. In the Orient he went on various expeditions and held at least one good job at Macao, where the grotto of Camoes, which legend connects with literary labor, is still shown to the tourist. He was ship-wrecked off the mouth of the Mekong and swam ashore with the manuscript of his epic, a circumstance he celebrates in the poem. On several occasions he was imprisoned, and, when finally released and sent home, had great trouble on the way from