



Concepts of “Reversed Ekfrásis”: Camões’s Poetry in Portuguese Artistic Narrative¹

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Abstract. Since its publication in 1572 the poem *Os Lusíadas* by Luís de Camões has been considered a masterwork, describing in decasyllabic verses one of the most extraordinary events of the Portuguese sixteenth century: the conquest of seas never before sailed and the triumphant arrival in the lands of Calicut in 1497. However, it was only from the last quarter of the eighteenth century that Camões’s work became a scholarly benchmark in the *curriculum vitae* of Portuguese artists. This was due above all to the cultural context of the era, closely attuned to the interest of the Lisbon elites in recovering Portuguese poetic memory. It can be stated that this era witnessed the recovery of *Os Lusíadas*, which had won its own space in Lisbon artistic circles, later serving different “causes” throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, in a striking process of reversed “Ekfrásis”.

Keywords: Camões; *Os Lusíadas*; Painting; Mythology; Carlos Reis.

[es] Conceptos de “Ekfrásis” invertida: La poesía de Camões en la narrativa artística portuguesa

Resumen. El poema *Os Lusíadas*, de Luís de Camões, ha sido considerado, desde su publicación (1572), una obra maestra que describe en versos decasílabos uno de los acontecimientos más extraordinarios del siglo XVI portugués: la conquista de mares nunca antes navegados y la llegada victoriosa de los portugueses a tierra de Calecut en 1497. Sin embargo, recién a partir del último cuarto del siglo XVIII la obra de Camões se convierte en un referente académico en el currículum de los artistas portugueses, principalmente por el contexto cultural de la época, en estrecha sintonía con el interés de las élites lisboetas por recuperar la memoria poética portuguesa. Puede decirse que fue en esta época cuando se rescataron *Os Lusíadas*, que conquistaron su propio espacio en el medio artístico lisboeta, sirviendo luego a diversas “causas” a lo largo de los siglos XIX y XX, en un notorio proceso de “Ekfrásis” invertida.

Palabras clave: Camões, *Os Lusíadas*, Pintura, Mitología, Carlos Reis.

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1. Introduction

From the last quarter of the eighteenth century up to the present day, the field of Portuguese narrative has come to occupy its own space of representation in the pictorial work of different Portuguese artists. However, literary sources have been used as a conceptual launch pad since time immemorial. For example, the artist involved in the wall paintings in the House of the Lyre player (Pompeii) based his work on Virgil’s *Aeneid* (70 BC – 19 AD) and on the episode that tells of Queen Dido’s love affair with Aeneas. As with the artists of Classical Antiquity, who drew on literary sources in order to inspire their creativity, the epic poem *Os Lusíadas* (published in 1572) by Luís Vaz de Camões (c. 1524-1580) was a valuable source of inspiration for different artists, both Portuguese and of other nationalities, throughout various centuries, serving different social and artistic contexts.

The present article sets out to reveal the symbiotic dichotomy that lies behind the concept of Reversed Ekphrasis, based on Camões’s oeuvre, which artists and how they used this poetic source to execute their works, with special emphasis on the pictorial cycle made by Carlos Reis (1863-1940) for the Lisbon Military Museum.

2. *The Lusíadas* in Portuguese images in the eighteenth to nineteenth centuries

Since it was first published in 1572, *Os Lusíadas* has taken on the mantle of genius. However, the first half of the eighteenth century apparently saw a heated debate in the heart of the scholars and intellectuals of the era about the “legality” of the Latin poets, among whom they included Virgil and Camões, as can be confirmed:

In 1740, Padre Master Manoel de Azeveo of the Company of Jesus, public teacher of Rhetoric in the University of Évora concluded: in the first he presided in the royal room over some conclusions, that he entitled *Poeticae facultatis Amphiteatrum* which he understood as the very vast *assumpto* of all Poetry, and human letters, destroying with happy endeavour the difficulties of the arguments; and proving with examples ancient and modern the impugned Laws of Eloquence, and undoing the sharp criticisms made of the great poets, like Virgil, Camoens (“Portugal”, 1740, p. 336).

But if in the first half of the sixteenth century there existed a moment of controversy around the work of Virgil and Camões, without our knowing the background that gave rise to this literary polemic, a genuine interest in recovering the memory of Camões arose, stimulated perhaps by the translation of *Os Lusíadas* into English by the Englishman William Julius Mickle (1734-1788), who came to Portugal in 1779 where he was received by D. João Carlos de Bragança (1719-1806), 2nd Duke of Lafões, a great admirer of Camões’s works.

In 1781 the *Gazeta de Lisboa* (the main Portuguese newspaper providing political and social information in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries) reported the sale of a complete edition of Luís de Vaz de Camões’s complete works: “All the works

of Luís de Camões came to light with 4 large vols, and a complete edition, made through the diligence and industry of Luis Francisco Xavier Coelho, disposed and ordered by Padre Thomaz José de Aquino” (“Sahio á luz”, 1781, p. 14), perhaps influenced by the illustrious action of William Mickle. Reference should also be made to the fact that the Englishman William Beckford (1760-1844), who lived in Lisbon between 1787 and 1787, declared this in his writing:

I could scarcely sleep because of the bells ringing, the beat of the drums and the bugle calls, which began right at dawn, in honour of the Corpus Christi festival. I would have preferred to remain at home writing to you and reading Camões (Beckford, 1983, p. 53).



Figure 1. Cyrillo Volkmar Machado, *The Council of the Gods*, c. 1786-87. Fresco painting. © Joaquim Rodrigues dos Santos.

It is in this context of valuing Camões's work that Cyrillo Volkmar Machado (1748-1823) executed in the old Ballroom of the Palace of the Barão da Quintela and Conde de Farrobo (Lisbon) in 1786-87, a composition for a ceiling painting whose subject matter refers back to different cantos of Camões's work, namely Cantos I, II and VI. However, before undertaking the analysis of the interconnection between verbal expressivity and figurative experience, it should be mentioned that *Os Lusíadas*³ constituted a poetic landmark dedicated to all men, whether aristocrats or the common man, who were an important part of the universal geo-maritime turn. *Os Lusíadas* sounded the glory of the heroic deeds of the Portuguese Discoveries, exploring new paths to the world, as well as the quest for progress and material wealth. The discovery of the sea route to India in 1497 by Vasco da Gama (1469-1524) promoted a universal shift in knowledge of the *mappa mundi*.

It is therefore important to know the narrative in images conceived by Cyrillo, which begins at the moment when the *Council of the Gods* (Canto I, 40-41) ends: Jupiter has demanded the help of the main gods and goddess on Olympus so they might collaborate with the Portuguese in their heroic maritime endeavour – reaching the East. After Jupiter's deliberation, the gods and goddesses return to their homes, with the promise concerning the protection of the Portuguese in uncharted seas. Thus, the Portuguese quest takes on a mythical dimension.

We find the main characters of this mythological plot at the apex of the ceiling painting: Jupiter, the powerful and sublime father, and Venus, engaged in an "expressive kiss" as described in Canto II (42):

Touched by those tender protestations
That would have moved a tiger's heart,
With a countenance such, as when turned
Downwards, brightens the darkest skies,
He dried her tears and kissed her face,
Embracing her flawless bosom
So fervently that had they been in private
Another Cupid might have been arrived at.

Venus, as we know, is the great protector of the Lusitanian people. The "expressive kiss" results from Venus's laments to the "grão Tonante" to help the Portuguese, seeing that these are the target of the cunning tricks of Bacchus, who does everything he can to prevent the Portuguese from reaching "the famous lands of India" (Canto I, 64). One of the malicious god's schemes was to have hired a "wicked Moor" to insinuate himself into the fleet of one of the captains so that, through the lie, he might lead them to their death: "But the pilot, fertile in invention / As malevolent Bacchus inspired him, / Plotted death, enslavement, or shipwreck / Before the Portuguese could reach India (Canto I, 97).

Jupiter, under the influence of Venus's tender words, then sends Mercury to aid the Portuguese fleet; this god had already appeared in dreams to Vasco de Gama to show him a safe place that he might reach, "Malindi was the port to which he sped" (Canto II, 56-57). In fact, on the right-hand side of the painting is a pensive Moor,

³ All English translations are taken from White, L. (1997). *The Lusíadas*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.

with a turban,⁴ who is believed to be the Moor instructed by Bacchus to interfere in the destiny of the Portuguese.

Having thus defined all the main characters of this painting, along with Bacchus, who is located below these gods and goddesses and is holding in one of his hands his symbol, the thyrsus (a wand decorated with twigs and vines). Cyrillus has represented him gripping his beard with a hand, infuriated. The god of war, Mars (son of Jupiter and Juno), the one with the “Raising the beaver of his diamond-cut/ Helmet” (Canto I, 37), is also shown here, more precisely in the upper left part of the composition, wearing the warrior’s armour and a red cloth around him, pushing Venus into Jupiter’s arms. Mars thus demonstrates his support for this goddess, and therefore, the Portuguese cause. His discourse, very eloquent, is referred to in Canto I (38-40) of *Os Lusíadas*, exhorting Jupiter to fulfil the prophecy he made to the Portuguese, and he spoke:

Father, whose authority
Everything you created must acknowledge
If you really want to protect these
People whose exploits you so admire
In their search for another world,
Stand by your judgement. You ordained
Their fate aeons ago That’s my advice,
Close your ears to pedlars of prejudice.

Returning to the painting, the siblings Apollo and Diana are shown, facing in the same direction as Venus and Jupiter, but placed further down. These two gods represent day and night, and therefore show the qualities that give stability to the elements: “Just then, Phoebus in his crystal chariot/ Plunged the bright day underwater/ Giving way to his sister/ Moon to keep/ The broad world glimmering in his sleep” (Canto I, 56). Apollo seems to point to Bacchus, God of wine and disorder, and his face is turned to his sister, Diana. It is probable that the presence of this sun god is also related to the fact that he goes against everything that brings destruction and disease, making it clear that both he and his sister were supporting actors in the story of the Portuguese success.

The figure of Hercules also stands out in this pictorial composition, relatively close to the “false” Moor who is standing with his back turned to the viewer. Hercules, son of Jupiter and Amalthea, was considered a model of virtues: he combined strength, courage and intelligence. One of the deeds of this god was having made it possible for the Mediterranean Sea to access the Atlantic Ocean, just as Camões expressed in Canto VI, 1, p. 119):

The Muslim king was at his wits’ end
How to entertain the brave mariners,
To gain the Christian king’s alliance
And the friendship of such strong people.
He spoke of his grief he was lodged so far

⁴ This representation of the Moor with a turban is not a real image of the oriental universe, but rather an ideal construction that held sway until fairly late in Portugal and Europe.

From the abundant lands of Europe,
Lamenting fortune had not placed his villas
Much nearer Hercules' illustrious pillars.

Everything indicates that Cyrillo established an analogy between Hercules's pioneering spirit and that of the Portuguese, in the way they opened up knowledge of lands and seas located beyond Cabo Bojador. Cyrillo also included the devastating storm generated by Bacchus, inserting Neptune into the lower part of the painting, wielding the trident and holding with his hand Amphitrite "Neptune's delicious wife" (Canto VI, 21) Mercury is equally on display, looking at Amphitrite and offering her an arrow. In her right hand this nymph holds the flag with the coat of arms of Portugal on which Cyrillo has placed Bacchus's foot, in this way emphasising that this god is the arch-enemy of the Portuguese. This maritime group described here is related to Canto VI (11-15), in which Bacchus unleashes a storm to prevent the Lusitanians from reaching the "promised" land. After the departure from Melinde for Calicut, and given that all his plans have been frustrated due to Venus's intervention, Bacchus then makes his way to "Neptune's palaces" to persuade this god to call a Council, so that all the marine entities may cooperate in the violent storm he unleashes, namely the help of the king of the seas and other marine entities, in order to prevent the ships of Vasco da Gama, Paulo da Gama (1465-1499) and Nicolau Coelho (1460-1502) from reaching India.

Neptune then orders the council to meet and delegates to Triton the summoning of the "Cold-water gods". In fact, this "This huge, swarthy youth" (Canto VI, 16) is represented blowing into the "huge twisted conch" (Canto VI, 19) of the invocation. The pictorial representation of Neptune matches Camões's description of Triton: "The hairs of his beard and the hair / Falling from his head to his shoulders / Were all one mass of mud, and visibly / Had never been touched by a comb" (Canto VI, 17). Then, above Triton, the artist represents Eolus, god of the winds, who begins under Neptune's command, and under the effects of Bacchus's malign words, "His strongest, wildest nor-and-nor-east galers" (Canto VI, 35). The wind has only died down with the intervention of the "amorous star" (Canto VI, 85), that is, Venus who realises this has been yet another of Bacchus's deeds: "This is, for certain, Bacchus' work" (Canto VI, 86), and sends the "Ninfas amorosas" to calm "The virulence /of their combat" (Canto VI, 88). It is probable that Amphitrite is equally represented here as an amorous nymph who has contributed to the weakening of the winds. Thus, it is thanks to the intervention of Venus and the nymphs that the fleet commanded by Vasco da Gama reaches Calicut. The ships shown in the lower right corner represent the arrival: "That land ahead is surely Calicut" (Canto VI, 92), "This is India" (Canto VI, 93). Based on this analysis, it can be summed up that the story Cyrillo painted was the one that Camões described, and could well be entitled "The gods of Olympus and the adventures of the Portuguese voyage overseas just as Camões recounted it" (Fig. 1).

Behind the heroic exaltation of the Portuguese exists another idea: the celebration of an extraordinary feat that made possible the opening up to international trade and the enrichment of Joaquim Pedro Quintela (1748-1817), owner of the palace and the man who commissioned the paintings in the Ballroom. After this painting with Camonian traces made for the Quintela family, Cyrillo turned again to Camões's oeuvre in 1798, and more concretely Canto V, for the allegorical interpretation of the giant

Adamastor, whose image is depicted in the ceiling painting in the Discoveries Room in the National Palace of Mafra. It is generally known that Jupiter was responsible for throwing Admastor into the confines of the Atlantic, due to his attempt to take the nymph Tetis by force (a clear allusion to the dichotomy of impossible love and the rejected lover).

Thereafter when Camões's work was revealed as the driving force inspiring heroic deeds in the Orient, from the nineteenth century onwards, the construction and consolidation of the concept of poetic genius made manifest in *Os Lusíadas* could be seen. The artists of Portuguese Romanticism contributed to this definition from the 1820s onwards, at the time of the publication of the poem "Camões" by the Romantic poet Almeida Garrett (1799-1854), and the exhibition in the Salon de Paris of the painting *The Death of Camões* by the poet Domingos Sequeira (1768-1837) (Elias, 2011, pp. 18, 145).

From 1840, Camões's poetic genius was recognised and began to gain in standing, while Camões's poetic words met the visual arts more frequently responding to different issues, almost always political and social in nature. In this scenario, the 2nd Triennial Exhibition of the Academy of Fine Arts of Lisbon (1843) presented to the public the works made by its teachers and pupils over a period of three years, namely the group of statues *Camões coroado pelo Génio da Nação* (*Camões crowned by the Genius of the Nation*) by Francisco de Assis Rodrigues (1801-1877), who taught sculpture in the Academy of Fine Arts in Lisbon. This work, made on the basis of the last canto of *Os Lusíadas*, was widely praised (Fig. 2).



Figure 2. Joaquim António Marques; Francisco Assis Rodrigues, *Camões coroado pelo Génio da Nação* (*Camões crowned by the Genius of the Nation*), 1843. Lithography, 225 × 17 cm. National Library of Portugal, Lisbon, E. 51 P.

In the last years of the nineteenth century, more precisely in 1880, it may be stated that a social movement emerged that greatly strengthened the Portuguese genius, celebrated in *Os Lusíadas*. This question is fully felt in the celebrations for Camões's Tricentenary,

reties the thread of national solidarity and makes us understand the value of our strength, at the same time giving us the understanding of our destinies, teaching the people how it is that through the sublime eloquence of *Os Lusíadas*, we enter today into the current of the European spirit (D'Azevedo, 1880, p. 90).

This "current of the European spirit" refers to the celebrations that took place in different European countries, around the "centenaries of giants of universal history and culture, like Espinos, Hegel, Dante, Voltaire, Rousseau, Petrarch, Michelangelo or Cervantes" (Soares, 2019, p. 103). In fact, confirming the celebrations that happened around Camões and his work, the periodical review *O Occidente* reproduced the picture by the painter Ernest Slingeneyer (1820-1894), an artist linked to the Academy of Fine Arts of Brussels (See *O Occidente*, 59, 1880). This artist based himself precisely on the episode of the shipwreck that Camões suffered close to the coast of Cambodia, escaping by swimming away, saving the manuscripts of what would become his masterpiece: "Gently, compassionately, he will receive / On his broad bosom these Cantos, snatched / Soaking from sad wretched shipwreck" (Canto X, 128).

The celebrations of Camões's Tricentenary coincide equally with the success of the exploratory journeys to the interior of the African continent by Hermenegildo Capelo (1841-1917), Alexandre de Serpa Pinto (1846-1900) and Roberto Ivens (1850-1898), evoking reminiscences of the Portuguese trailblazing in discovering the sea route to India, and the Portuguese imperial past. The beginning of the Portuguese exploratory journeys to the African continent (1877), motivated by the exploratory expeditions of the British explorers David Livingstone (1813-1873), Henry Stanley (1841-1904) and Verney Cameron (1844-1894) took place at a time when Portugal was dealing with the lack of a forward-looking driving force, making people long for a profound regeneration of the country. In this context, one understands the adhesion of Portugal to the philosophical trend known as Positivism, a philosophical trend that arose in France at the beginning of the nineteenth century. It argues that scientific knowledge is the only true form of knowledge, thus meeting Republican ideals and contributing categorically to the Tricentennial celebrations for Camões, whose ideological basis was strongly linked to the national identity. From this moment, the nation came to be symbolised by Camões, who "will continue to be, even after the proclamation of the Republic, the great mythical reference of the republican culture and patriotism" (Medina, 1990, as cited in Moura, 2011, p. 26). However, as stated above, from 1843 a feeling of patriotism involving the name of Camões and his work had taken root, coinciding equally with the search for the "national style", driven by an elite which included the novelist, historian and journalist Alexandre Herculano (1810-1877), as well as the Portuguese monarch King Fernando II of Saxe-Coburg (1816-1885).

It was in a context of national crisis and, at the same time, the relaunching of Portugal in the international colonial context, that the parameters of Lusitanian heroism, transmitted in Camões's works, and a Portuguese Golden Age, become prominent in the works of artists of Historical Painting, namely Miguel Ângelo Lupi (1826-1883), appointed Professor of Historical Painting at the Academy of Fine Arts in Lisbon

in 1864. This artist, drawing on Canto IV (93), made a sketch which narrates the moment when the leader of the Portuguese fleet decides on the immediate embarkation of the navigators in Lisbon, which corresponds to the genesis of the Portuguese overseas adventure in the Indian Ocean. This sketch shows the energetic figure of Vasco da Gama planted on the quay, categorically pronouncing the withdrawal of the navigators, very probably the captains of the rest of the fleet, Paulo da Gama and Nicolau Coelho, who are glimpsed in a ship that displays the flag of the Order of Christ (see Moreira, 1898). The three ships that left from Lisbon in 1497 (São Gabriel, São Rafael and Bérrio) can be seen in the distance.

It is not possible to determine the real intention behind the execution of this subject, but it seems have been an ambitious proposal, generated perhaps in the sphere of the Camões celebrations. It is known for certain that Miguel Ângelo Lupi (see Silveira & Tavares, 2002) did make a series of artistic boards relating to *The Departure of Vasco da Gama*:

If he could concentrate in one truly grandiose work those various and admirable faculties, if he could apply to a work, that was the definitive expression of his genius, the prodigious contention of his work, he would bequeath to the work a masterpiece that would be the most glorious affirmation of Portuguese art in the second half of the nineteenth century, He made the boards of the *Departure of Vasco da Gama* and of *Egas Moniz*, but there was never a government that made available to the great artist the means necessary to carry out his work (Chagas, 1883, p. 86).

The Oporto publisher Emilio Biel let himself be infected with the Camões “fever” – probably influenced by the illustrated edition of *Os Lusíadas*, sponsored by King Luís I (1838-1889) and directed by the historian Manuel Pinheiro Chagas (1842-1895) in 1878 – having commissioned from some of the most notable artists in Europe a set of engravings to illustrate *Os Lusíadas*, whose elevated quality demonstrates the Biel company’s diligence. The Hungarian artist Sandór Liezen-Mayer (1839-1898) and the German engraver Johann Lindner (1839-1906) were expressly asked to illustrate various cantos of Camões’s work (see *O Occidente*, 56, 1880).

Ten years after the Camões Tricentennial celebrations, a diplomatic event occurred that left an indelible mark on the 1890s in Portugal: The British Ultimatum to Portugal (1890), which thwarted pretensions to Portuguese sovereignty in the territories located between Mozambique and Angola, that gave rise to the famous “Pink Map” (1886). This event launched a political crisis, provoking a social and political movement of patriotic exaltation and, at the same time, a challenge to the Monarchy.

It was in the socio-political context of the last quarter of the nineteenth century that the artist Columbano Bordalo Pinheiro (1857-1929; see Elias, 2011) drew on *Os Lusíadas* (Canto I, 4-5) for the conception of *Camões and the Tágides* (1894), whose aesthetic is close to the french painter Louis Deschamps (1846-1902). This painting was shown for the first time “in the salon of the bookshop of Mr. Gomes, an amiable cynic, intelligent and of good taste” (Arthur, 1894, p. 138). It received very favourable criticism: “This great picture is perfectly composed and executed, the figure of Camões is a marvel, the nymphs of the Tagus are delicious” (“Chronica Occidental”, 1894, p. 137). The works presented in this art exhibition established Columbano Bordalo Pinheiro as an artist, *Camões and the Tágides* having “dominated the exhibition”, as is confirmed below:

Queen Amélia inaugurated two exhibitions of painting, and, moreover, two extremely notable exhibitions, that constitute a true national glory, The first was that of Columbano Bordalo Pinheiro's pictures (...). Dominating the exhibition, is a huge canvas inspired by some verses from the *Lusiadas*, verses 4 and 5 of Canto I: And you, nymphs of the Tagus, who / First suckled my infant genius ("Chronica Occidental, 1894, p. 137).

However, although the painting was inspired by Canto I, which describes the moment when Camões asks the Tágides for "a loftier tone / a style both grand and contemporary" (Canto I, 4, p. 3), other not so obvious features also seem to appear in this painting. It is very likely that Columbano is also demanding for himself, like Camões, "a loftier tone", a creative influence deriving from the celestial spheres, so as to achieve a successful artistic career, as in fact came to pass: "Columbano, great painter, ends up immortalising his name with the exhibition we refer to and that is an affirmation of a powerful artistic genius, that marks an era in our art history" ("Chronica Occidental", 1894, p. 137). Everything leads us to believe, then, that Columbano distanced himself from the problems that marked his time and projected himself on to the canvas like Camões, surrounded by the nymphs of the Tagus (or muses), whom he begs "Fire me now with mighty cadences, / Not a goatherd's querulous piping / But the shouts of a battle trumpet" (Canto I, 5), in order to strive in this way for the much desired recognition of his work in this way, something that all artists wish to achieve in their lifetime (and the majority do not). It is only the glimpse of the emblematic Tower of Belém, in the distance, that impels us to state that it is the only element in this picture that refers back to the reign of King Manuel I and the overseas voyage to India (Fig. 3). Indeed, it was the exhibition in Mr. Gomes's bookshop that made Columbano's name, helped perhaps by the inspiring force of the muses of the Tagus...



Figure 3: Columbano Bordalo Pinheiro, *Camões and the Tágides*, 1894. Oil on canvas, 24,3 × 29,3 cm. Museu Nacional Grão Vasco, Viseu, Portugal. Photo: Luísa Oliveira, 2013.

In 1998 saw the IV Centenary of the Discovery of the Sea Route to India (1498) by Vasco da Gama, the navigator immortalised by Camões in his poem:

Glorious names like that of Vasco da Gama, mariners who in their hearts are rivals of the famous admiral; there were too many in Portugal to mention, but the hero, who deserved to be sung by Luiz de Camões, was the one who placed a luminous finish on all these works (Camara, 1898, p. 113).

The promotion of this event in the city of Lisbon was celebrated through various festivities, that served equally to stimulate the morale of the people, a state of mind deriving, certainly from the diplomatic failure that enveloped Portugal and Great Britain. Behind the initiative of the commemorations, was the Lisbon Geographical Society. It was in this context that the Society launched a painting competition, whose subject referred back to Canto VII (5-9) of *Os Lusíadas*. The first and second places were won by Ernesto Condeixa (1858-1933) and Veloso Salgado (1864-1945), respectively:

Of the competitions which were held, the most notable was certainly the one with the pictures representing Vasco da Gama in the audience with the Samorim (...), but it is never too much to cite names like those of Salgado, the winner, and Condeixa, whose excellent qualities as a painter were demonstrated once again (Camara, 1898, p. 113).



Figure 4. Veloso Salgado, Vasco da Gama before the Samorim of Calicut, 1898. In Wikipédia. https://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ficheiro:Vasco_da_Gama_perante_o_Samorim_de_Calecute.png

The critics were unanimous in considering Veloso Salgado's "patriotic painting" to be notable. This artist was masterly in the way he presented the "history" made evident in Canto I (59-64), which sums up Vasco da Gama's triumphal arrival at the western coast of India, and the first contact that took place between the navigator and the Samorim of Calicut. Thus, an eloquent Vasco da Gama is seen "speaking from a wise heart / in a voice whose grave authority" (Canto VII, 59), presenting his demands (and those of the kingdom of Portugal) to the Samorim of Calicut as a way of establishing commercial alliances through concord: "And if you are willing, with sacred pacts / And treaties of sincere friendship, / To begin trade in the abundance / Of goods between his land and yours" (Canto VII, 62), the main objective of the fourteenth-century Portuguese overseas voyage (Fig. 4).

Still in the context of the celebrations of the IV Centenary of the Discovery of the Sea Route to India, what stands out is the entrepreneurship of Ernesto Moreira de Sá (rather like Emilio Biel) and the work *A viagem de Vasco da Gama. Trechos que mais se prendem com o assumpto, tirados do poema de Luiz de Camões "Os Lusíadas"* (1898), combining the Camonian poetic essence with the authorial image. The publisher invited some artists, for example the sketch artist Lubin David who by all accounts was a "distinguished Italian artist", it is known for certain that Lubin David was in Portugal at least from 1880, as he collaborated with the French painter and engraver Louis Adolfe Salmon (1806-1895) and the engraver and illustrator Eugène-André Champollion (1848-1901) in executing the portrait of Vasco da Gama⁵ for *O Livro do Centenário de Camões em 1880*.

Regarding the two drawings conceived by Lubin David for Moreira de Sá, these are related to Cantos IV (67) and V (37-39), namely King Manuel I's prophetic dream entrusting to Vasco da Gama the discovery of the sea route to India, which Lubin David's artistic imagination staged in a neo-gothic atmosphere; and a huge terrifying Adamastor emerging from the ocean waters, with only the solitary ship of Vasco da Gama to be seen, in a possible vision of "seas never sailed by anybody else" (Fig. 5; Fig. 6).

⁵ See National Library of Portugal (Lisbon – E. 1031 A).

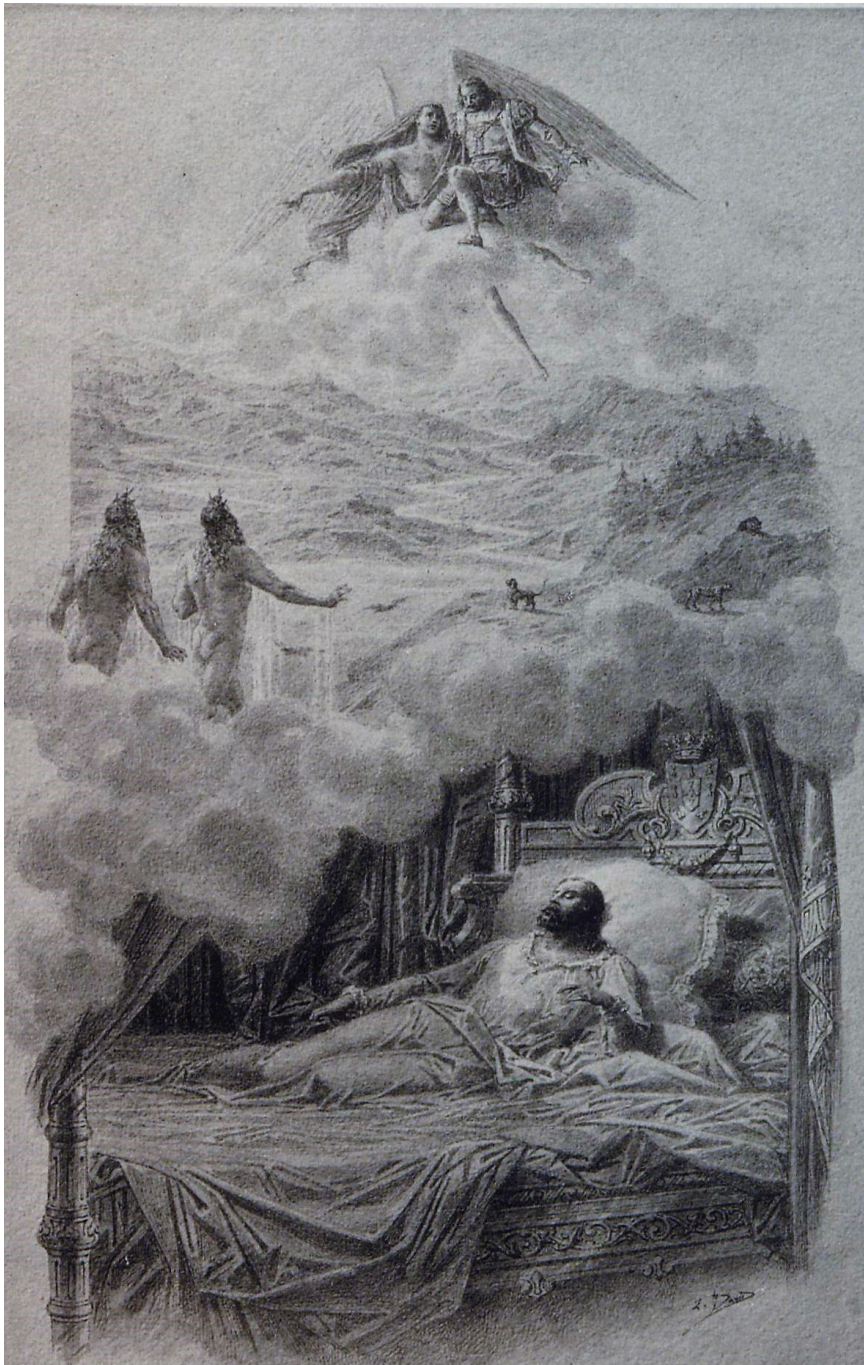


Figure 5. Lubin David, King Manuel I's prophetic dream entrusting to Vasco da Gama the discovery of the sea route to India, 1898. Drawing. In *A viagem de Vasco da Gama. Trechos que mais se prendem com o assumpto, tirados do poema de Luiz de Camões "Os Lusíadas". Acompanhados de versões em Hespanhol, Italiano, Francez, Allemão e Inglez e coligidos por Ernesto Moreira de Sá*, 1898.



Figure 6. Lubin David, *Adamastor*, 1898. Drawing. In *A viagem de Vasco da Gama. Trechos que mais se prendem com o assumpto, tirados do poema de Luiz de Camões "Os Lusíadas". Acompanhados de versões em Hespanhol, Italiano, Francez, Allemão e Inglez e coligidos por Ernesto Moreira de Sá*, 1898.

3. The paintings of Carlos Reis for Vasco da Gama Room in the Military Museum of Lisbon

To end this discussion of artists who drew on the Camonian universe for the conception of their works, it finally remains for us to analyse the paintings on canvas that decorate the walls of the Vasco da Gama Room in the Military Museum of Lisbon (See Correia, 2002), made by the painter Carlos Reis, professor in the School of Fine Arts, who painted them between 1903 and 1909. This pictorial cycle is part of the Artillery Museum's modernization policy (today's Military Museum), undertaken by Eduardo Ernesto de Castelo Branco (1840-1905), appointed director of the Artillery Museum in 1876, having raised "the Artillery Museum to one of the first, of its kind, in Europe, working day and night for almost thirty years, to achieve such a flattering result" (R., 1905, p. 3). This explains the commissioning of the Vasco da Gama Room paintings from Carlos Reis and other artists of the time, such as Columbano Bordalo Pinheiro.

The episodic sequence of the paintings in the Vasco da Gama Room is not known for certain, but everything indicates that there does not seem to be any correlation between them, with Carlos Reis displaying the most admirable events of the Portuguese overseas voyage to India. Thus the iconographical reading could begin on the north wall, with the gathering of the gods of Olympus, namely Jupiter, father of the gods; Juno, his wife; Mars, god of war; Vulcan, god of fire; Mercury, messenger of the gods; and finally, Venus, goddess of love, surrounded by the Three Graces. How-

ever, although the apparent meeting of the gods directs us towards a council, it is felt that this painting is focused on the dialogue between Venus and Jupiter, just as it is described in Canto II (40-44), of *Os Lusíadas*. The conversation between them both was motivated by the almost total annihilation of the Portuguese fleet by the King of Mombasa (in collusion with Bacchus), nevertheless prevented due to Venus's intervention. Faced with this situation, the goddess of love goes to Olympus to ask Jupiter to protect the Portuguese, expressing the love she feels for the Lusitanians, in the following way: "These are my people, for whom I shed / Tears I find were shed uselessly, / Have been led by my love into danger" (Canto II, 40). Before this sadness, Jupiter counters:

My lovely daughter, do not fear
 For the safety of your Portuguese
 Nor that anything weighs more with me
 Than those sovereign tearful eyes;
 I promise you, daughter, you will see
 The Greeks and Romans far outshone
 By what people of Portuguese descent
 Will accomplish throughout the Orient (Canto II, 44).

This implies the existence of a sacred dimension that protects the Lusitanians and, at the same time, pervades the futuristic notion of immortality granted to the Portuguese heroes in the transformation of history (Fig. 7). In the lower part of the canvas Vasco da Gama's fleet can be seen sailing calmly to India, protected from the prodigious impulses of the gods of Olympus, just as promised by the father of the gods to Venus, helped in this task by Mercury, who shows Vasco da Gama the way to Melinde:

With these word, Jove dispatched
 Divine Mercury down to the earth,
 His mission to find a harbour the fleet
 Could approach without forebodings,
 And so prevent da Gama lingering
 Further in treacherous Mombasa
 To convey to him in his dream which port
 Would offer the tranquillity he sought (Canto II, 56).

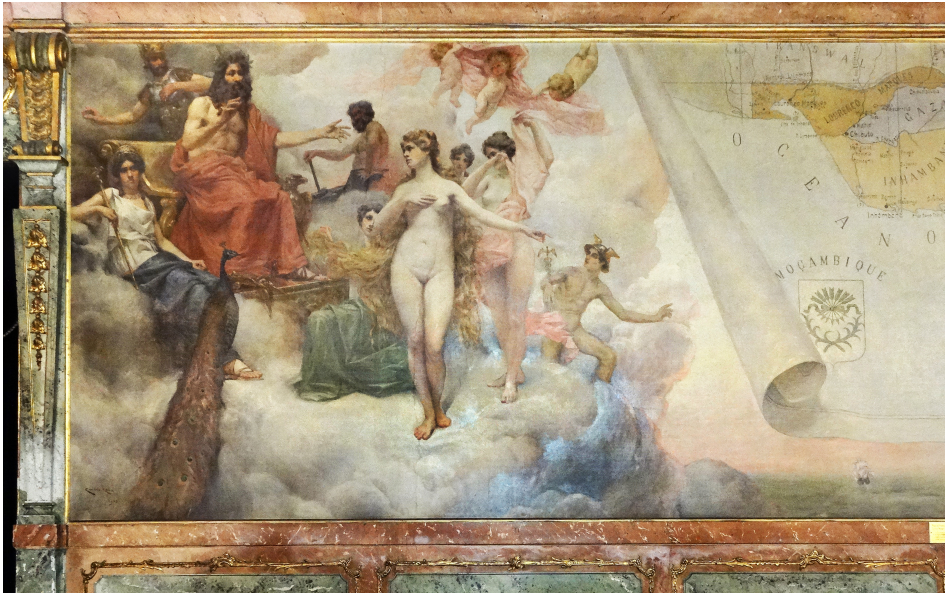


Figure 7. Carlos Reis, *The goddess of Love goes to Olympus to ask Jupiter to protect the portuguese*, 1903. Oil on canvas, 26, 7×95, 6 cm. Military Museum of Lisbon, Inv. MML00024. Photo: author.

Surprisingly, following Venus's "pleas", the artist then conceived the representation of the different provinces that comprised the territory of Mozambique at the beginning of the nineteenth century, "obliterating", just as José Augusto França (1922-2021) noted, the famous quarrel with the British Empire and the Pink Map of Portugal. This problem reveals that the commissioning "policy" would certainly define the representation of Portuguese glories at that time, since there was no room for the description of one of the most crucial moments of the Portuguese monarchical period of that age, which corresponds to a political failure. The ceiling painting of the painter and set designer Luigi Manini (1846-1936) also clearly demonstrates to us clearly the incumbency of Carlos Reis. Here the artist presents an apotheotic description of the Portuguese journeys to explore land and sea, in which we see the names of Hermenegildo Capelo, Roberto Ivens and Serpa Pinto, responsible for the journey to reconnoitre the territory between Angola and Mozambique. Here these nineteenth-century explorers are equated with the fifteenth-century Portuguese navigators who contributed as much to the formal delineation of the *mappa mundi* as, later on, to the hydrographic and natural knowledge of the African continent.

The presentation of the map of Mozambique may coincide equally with the investment of the Portuguese crown in the Mozambican economy and infrastructures, hence the absence of the Angolan territory. By way of example, in 1903 the Beira railway was considered the most important in the Portuguese territory of East Africa, with an extension of 600 km that crossed the lands of Manica and Sofala as far as Rhodesia. It was completed in 1897 and later extended in 1900 ("*Caminho de ferro na Beira. Africa Oriental*", 1903, p. 259). It was equally in this last historical moment of the Portuguese monarchy that the cities of Manica and Sofia were founded; and in 1892 new structures were launched in the Beira, namely new avenues ("*Beira*",

1903, pp. 192-193). Still in the same space of the broad canvas, Carlos Reis added the figure of Fame, or Victory that sings the illustrious name of the Lusitanians, probably based on *Os Lusíadas*: “With him he took Rumour to proclaim / The rare worth of the Portuguese / For reputation constrains respect / And he who has it, is cherished” (Canto II, 58), but adapted here to Portuguese efforts and the territorial conquest of the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

On the west-facing wall, only finished in 1909, we see the mythical figure of Vasco da Gama and the god Neptune, both suspended in the sea “chariot” pulled by two seahorses and by the nymphs in a celebratory triumphal procession (Fig. 8). The association between Vasco da Gama and Neptune allowed Carlos Reis to confer a mythic dimension on Vasco da Gama only achievable through the spirit of bravery demonstrated by this Portuguese navigator and his crucial role in the arrival in the Orient, by sea. It is probable that the artist based himself on Canto II (47):

You will see him, who is persevering
 In his intrepid search for India
 Strike fear into Neptune himself
 In a dead calm without a breath of wind
 A miracle never before witnessed,
 The ocean quaking spontaneously!
 Such strong people! Such bod expedients!
 To terrorise the very elements!



Figure 8. Carlos Reis, *Triumphal maritime procession: Vasco da Gama and Neptune*, 1909. Museu Militar de Lisboa, 457×267cm, MML0002.

On the south wall we find the image of the terrifying Adamastor who, as discussed above, has been an artistic subject since the last quarter of the eighteenth century. In Canto V (37-60), Camões told of the different hostilities faced by the Portuguese mariners from when they left Lisbon until they reached Melinde, de-

scribed by Vasco da Gama to the King of Melinde and where the Adamastor episode was included.

The artist Carlos Reis took advantage of the space available between the windows of the room to hang the three canvases alluding to the passage of the Portuguese ships round the Cape of Good Hope (former Cape of Storms) and the encounter with Adamastor. In a canvas of greater proportions than the others, he conceived the appearance of the menacing Adamastor threatening the bold Portuguese:

I am that vast, secret promontory
 You Portuguese call the Cape of Storms,
 Which neither Ptolemy, Pompey, Strabo
 Pliny nor any authors knew of.
 Here Africa ends. Here its coast
 Concludes in this, my vast inviolate
 Plateau, extending southwards to the Pole
 And, by your daring, struck to my very soul (Canto V, 50).

Just as he appeared, Adamastor then disappears, and the fleet continues on its voyage, as can be seen in the other two canvases that comprise this set (Fig. 9). Rounding the Cape of Good Hope was one of the most symbolic events of the history of the overseas voyage, revealing the triumph of man over the unknown, and equally, speaking to the audacious character of the Portuguese discoverers. In this way, a superhuman dimension is added to an unequalled event in the history of the expansion and conquests of humanity, undertaken under the aegis of the Portuguese.

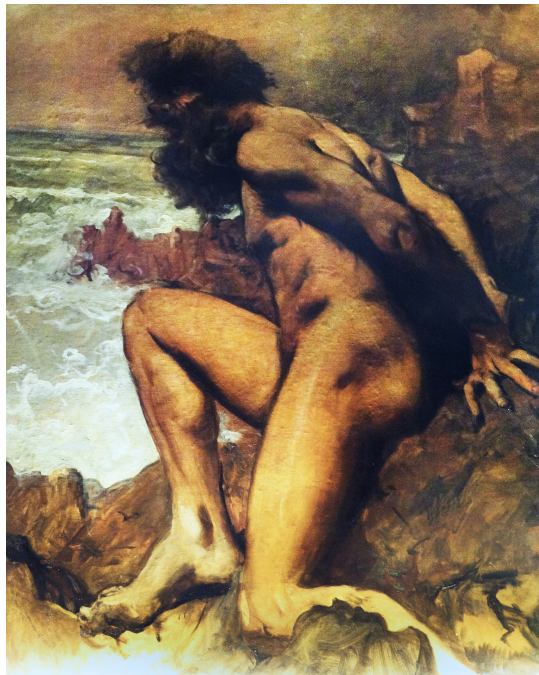


Figure 9. Carlos Reis, *Adamastor*, n.d. Oil on canvas. Museu Militar de Lisboa, 263×205cm, Inv. MML00026.

Finally, in the painting on the eastern wall, an imposing ship stands out, perhaps that of Vasco da Gama, displaying the cross of the Order of Christ, and two other ships are surrounded by nereids and tritons, in celebratory mode. It is supposed that the interpretation of this painting is linked to the moment when the Portuguese reach India, or rather Calicut: “This is the land you have been seeking / This is India rising before you” (Canto VI, 93). This painting seems to match the triumphal themes developed by Carlos Reis for the Vasco da Gama Room (Fig. 10).



Figure. 10. Carlos Reis, *Triumphal arrival of the Portuguese fleet to Calicut*, n.d.
Oil on canvas. Museu Militar de Lisboa, 267×520cm, Inv. MML00027.

Lastly, Carlos Reis made an allusion to Canto IX (22), and the episode of the *Island of Love*, in which Venus decides to recompense the adventures of the Portuguese and their victory, gathering the nymphs on an island prepared to receive them, having charged Cupid with the task of weaving bonds of passion between the nymphs and the Portuguese navigators, on the “divine island”. Canto X, one of the most emblematic of Camões’s works, and with which Camões culminates his masterpiece, deals with the *Banquet offered by Tetis on the Island of Venus to Gama and his companions* (Fig. 11).



Figure 11. Carlos Reis, *Cupid*, n.d. Oil on canvas. Museu Militar de Lisboa, 267×520cm, Inv. MML0002.

4. Conclusion

The Poetry Foundation considers that the ekphrastic poem is a living description of a scene, generally associated with a work of art. Through the imaginative art of narration and reflection of the “action”, whether in a painting or a sculpture, the poet extends and expands, its meaning (Ekphrasis. (2022, June 20). In *Poetry Foundation*. <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/learn/glossary-terms/ekphrasis>). In a broader definition, some encyclopedias also consider ekphrasis as a description of physical reality (objects, feelings, people) aimed at evoking a mental image as intense as if the real object being described was before the reader’s eyes (Ecphrasis ou Ekphrasis. (2022, June 21). In *E-Dicionário de Termos Literários de Carlos Ceia*. <https://edtl.fcsh.unl.pt/encyclopedia/ecphrasis>). In other words, the rhetorical exercise is so eloquent that it elicits the feeling that one is faced with the living expression of the inanimate. As for the concept *Reversed Ekphrasis*, we can state that it is the breath of artistic creation that possesses the power to transform poetry into “speaking” works of art, which could not be explained without reading the authors who have served as the “launch pad” for the stimulus of the creative capacities of the human

being. *Reversed Ekphrasis* is the voice of the artist, embodying in their individual and unsurpassable work the universe of the poetic word, expanding it and making it accessible to the common man.

Camões's poetry had the power to influence a generation of Portuguese artists and artists of other nationalities, who allowed themselves to be "contaminated" by the fertile "narrated stories" in the poem *Os Lusíadas*, particularly the episodes of *Adamastor* and the *Council of the Gods*. No doubt Luís Vaz de Camões was far from imagining that one day his work of genius would be immortalised in the works of different visual artists and constitute, in its own right, one of the most profuse examples of *Reversed Ekphrasis* in Portugal.

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