

Virgil in India: Epic, History, and Military Tactics in the *Lusiads*



Timothy Hampton

Camões begins the *Lusiads*, his great epic on Vasco da Gama's journey to India, by brushing aside both classical models of epic and the tradition of Italian romance. Forget, he says, "the journeys of the subtle Greek and the Trojan"—that is, Odysseus and Aeneas—and let's hear no more of Alexander or Trajan. Here we have a new experience, the experience of the Portuguese, whose deeds outshine those of the ancients, offering a greater valor, "outro valor mais alto." As for the Rodomonte, Ruggiero, and Orlando, the heroes of Ariosto's *Orlando furioso*, they are mere fantasies. Now we have a true history that will outshine the inventions of the writers of romance. Indeed, Vasco da Gama has outpaced the classical heroes, snatching fame from Aeneas himself—"de Enneais toma a fama."¹ Camões's poem is thus an account of a new kind of action—modern heroism—and a new kind of epic, based in history.

These gestures of literary modernism are familiar to readers of Renaissance epic, a genre that is as much about struggles over literary heritage as it is about war or conquest. However, it is striking that Camões both relegates Virgil's *Aeneid* to oblivion and then recalls it in his praise of da Gama. Virgil's poem would seem to be the epic model most generative of Camões's own. The structure of the *Aeneid*, divided as it is between six books of wandering about the Mediterranean

¹References to the *Lusiads* will cite Luís de Camões, *Obras Completas*. English translations will be from the version by White. I will occasionally amend White's version to conform more closely to the original. Book and stanza references will be included in the text.

and six books of war over Italy, offers the prototype for the structure of the *Lusiads*, divided between six books of wandering about the coast of Africa and four books of... well, dithering and negotiating in India. Indeed, one of the formal and rhetorical difficulties faced by Camões's poem is precisely that, in contrast to the noble models it evokes at the outset, it offers no great feats of heroism, no unforgettable battles and no superhuman instances of individual courage. The poem is, in effect, about a trading mission or diplomatic sally from the Portuguese to India. The project of the journey—to travel to a land never before reached by sea—was indeed daring. However the poem's claim to overgo literary predecessors encounters both formal and rhetorical difficulties when we realize that *Os Lusíadas* fails to generate a dramatic military enterprise commensurate with the overblown rhetoric about Portuguese daring that Camões deploys throughout. What then, does it do?²

At one level, the failure of the *Lusiads* to be "heroic" in any traditional epic sense of the word may be traced to its own historical moment. Da Gama sails in 1497, and the poem dates from 1572. Thus it raises the problem of what it would mean to write heroic epic in an age when merchants, scholars, and spies have replaced knights and heroes as the agents of history. In this context it is entirely fitting that Camões should turn to Aeneas, himself the least martial of epic heroes, as the prototype for da Gama. In what follows I consider Camões's undertaking of constructing epic action in the age of Galileo and Walsingham. I want to explore both Da Gama's changing status as an epic, or post-epic, hero, and Camões's status as a new Virgil. I will pursue this through a reading of the passages in the poem in which we seem most clearly to be in a post-epic world. That is, after the travelling and the encounters with monsters and unfriendly natives are behind us, and we are safely in India, trying to negotiate with the Samorim of Calicut. What kinds of values does such activity illustrate? And how does Camões's literary dialogue with Virgil work to impose the new poetics he signals at the outset?

There had, of course, been negotiating in Virgil. In Canto VII of the *Aeneid* Aeneas and his men land in Italy, and he sends a diplomatic mission, headed by Ilioneus, to speak with King Latinus. We get a description of Latinus's palace, which features a representation of his ancestors, whose images are carved in cedar on the walls of his

²For accounts of the poem that focus on its relationship to emerging mercantilist networks—and the literary genres that accompany them, see Helgerson Chapter 4 and Quint Chapter 3.

stateroom. Latinus, believing that Aeneas is the answer to a prophecy, offers gifts of gold and fine horses. This moment of diplomatic comity is followed by the rabble rousing of Juno and Allecto, who stir the Latin youth to war, and the book closes with a long listing of all of the heroes of the Latin people, culminating in Turnus, with his great shield, bearing the image of Io.

In a gesture of structural imitation Camões's Canto VII features a similar scene of display. Having landed in Calicut, da Gama enters into initial relations with the Samorim. The Samorim's minister, the Catual, shows Da Gama images of the Hindu gods, and a set of carvings—worthy of Daedalus, we are told—depicting the rulers of India. This parade of images is concluded when the Catual tells Da Gama of a prophecy that new peoples will arrive to take over the area—a rewriting of the prophecy that persuades Latinus to throw in his lot with the Trojans (*Aeneid*, VII. 69ff). In Camões this is followed by a competing set of historical representations. The Catual visits Da Gama's boat to see a set of banners depicting the history of the Portuguese. The poet breaks off as he comes to the figure of Lusus, founder of the nation, and turns to invoke his muse and lament the corruption of the Portuguese court. Thus both poems feature scenes of historical frescoes in Canto VII. The firing up of the Latin youth in Virgil is structurally paralleled by the lament of the exiled poet in Camões. The collective project of Latins at war gives way to the solitude of the individual writer, far from home.

These structural parallels are continued in the early sections of Canto VIII. In Virgil, Turnus raises the flag of war. Thus it was throughout Latium, says Virgil: "Talia per Latium." For his part, Aeneas watches the proceedings and is overwhelmed with worry.

Talia per Latium. quae Laomedontius heros
 cuncta videns magno curarum fluctuat aestu
 atque animum nunc huc celerem, nunc dividit illuc
 in partisque rapit varias perque omnia versat:
 sicut aquae tremulum labris ubi lumen aënis
 sole repersuccum aut radiantis imagine lunae
 omnia pervolitat late loca iamque sub auras
 erigitur summiq; ferit laquearia tecti.

[Thus it was throughout Latium. And the hero of Laomedon's line, seeing it all, tosses on a mighty sea of troubles; and now hither, now thither he swiftly throws his mind, casting it in diverse ways, and turning it to every shift; as when in brazen bowls a flickering light from water, flung back by the sun or the moon's glittering form, flits far and wide o'er all things, and now mounts high and smites the fretted ceiling of the roof aloft.]³

This remarkable passage resonates in a number of ways within Virgil's own poem, as well. At the level of character development, it offers a modulation to Aeneas's earlier activities in the poem as a seafarer, now casting him as a general, still sea-tossed, but now tossed metaphorically, on a "mighty sea of troubles." At the level of literary history, it gives us the Virgilian answer to Odysseus, the Homeric hero of many turns. Aeneas doesn't turn about like the "polytropos," as Odysseus is called in the opening line of the *Odyssey*. It is his mind that turns about—"in partisque rapit varis perque omnia versat." Homer gives us a sneaky dissimulator. Virgil gives us an unquiet-minded insomniac, trying to figure out what to do. At still another level it offers an extreme moment of rhetorical embellishment, since the epic simile of the reflecting water recalls—reflects upon—the first half of the passage, with its image of the sea of troubles—an image that itself recalls Aeneas's earlier storm-tossed travels—"imago curarum fluctuat aestu" (my emphasis). Yet the simile also undercuts that initial description. The description suggests that Aeneas controls his thoughts—he "turns them," "versat"—whereas the simile suggests that he cannot control them; they bounce about.

The simile of the reflected light comes from Apollonius of Rhodes's *Argonautica* (III, 751-60), which describes Medea's worry over the fate of Jason. The *Argonautica* is a text of some interest for Camões, who is blending travel with epic in similar ways. As W.R. Johnson has noted, Virgil's rewriting of Apollonius turns Medea's love passion into a meditation on character and moral purpose.⁴ Yet the resonan-

³All references to the *Aeneid* will cite the edition of Fairclough. Henceforth book and line numbers will be included in my text. I have just quoted Book VIII, 18-25. For a general discussion of Camões and the "classical tradition," without however reference to the passages that concern me here, see Costa Ramalho Chapter 1. For a comprehensive *Quellenforschung* study of the relationship between the two poets, Costa Ramalho refers to Dantas, which I have not been able to consult.

⁴Extended discussion of the relationship between Apollonius's figure and Virgil's may be found in Johnson. Pöschl's influential study stresses the mediating role of the flickering light, as a transition from the "darkness" of the preparations for war to the brighter moment of Tiber's prophecy (146-48). Neither of these scholars notes the link back to Dido's suicide. On Camões's relationship to Apollonius more generally see Quint's *Epic and Empire*.

ces are even more powerful within Virgil's poem; the description of Aeneas's turning thoughts—"in partisque rapit varias perque omnia versatur"—repeats exactly Aeneas's response to the vision of Mercury that comes to warn him, back in Book IV, line 286, to give up building Carthage and embrace his destiny. As if to underscore the link Virgil tells us that the sleepless Aeneas is fretting against the background of animals that have settled happily into their nests. This detail, introduced with the phrase "nox erat" (VIII, 26) exactly cites the moment at which the desperate Dido takes her own life (IV. 523). In other words, Aeneas's nocturnal decision here will have consequences for future of Rome no less important than his earlier decision to turn his back on Carthage. The scene of the insomniac hero will offer the counterpart to the earlier scene of Dido's suicide. Epic choice has now given way to unquiet rest.

However what is striking is that, even as he turns things over in his mind, Aeneas never acts. Instead, he is acted upon. He receives a vision, in the form of the river god Tiberinus, who raises his leafy head, and, says the text, takes away Aeneas's cares by his speaking: "sic adfari et curas his demere dictis" (VIII. 35). Tiberinus goes on to reassure Aeneas of success in the coming military campaign. This super-human visitation from the land itself reveals Aeneas's worries to be temporary. Through the agency of the supernatural visitation the elaborate image of his turning mind modulates from a bout of anxiety to a thought exercise, a demonstration of the hero's proper intentions.

Virgil's depiction of the anxious Aeneas has resonances in both Renaissance political thought and in later epics. It is a commonplace of Renaissance political writing that the prince must always be vigilant and never sleep in order to protect his people. Homer said as much in *Iliad*, II. 24-25, where Agamemnon is reproached for sleeping when he should be watching. Erasmus of Rotterdam stresses the value of princely vigilance to the future Charles V in his 1516 handbook *The Education of the Christian Prince*, or *Institutio principis christiani*, in language that becomes commonplace in Renaissance handbooks on statecraft. The scene also paves the way for any number of later epic descriptions of vigilant generals on the eve of battle. Yet, what is striking about the epic leaders of Ariosto and Tasso, to take the signal examples who would have influenced Camões, is how unanxious they are when faced with strategic decisions. Ariosto's Charlemagne confronts the assault on Paris by the forces of Agramante in Canto 14 of *Orlando furioso* by both already having fortified the city adequately and firmly controlling those who long to sally forth before the action begins.

In the *Gerusalemme liberata*, Tasso's Goffredo has a tendency to pray when faced with difficult leadership decisions, but he never hesitates.⁵

In Camões, however, the situation is more complicated. In his depiction of Da Gama's dealings with the Samorim of Calicut, Camões rewrites in detail the Virgilian scenario I have just explicated. And his recasting of the scene marks his distance from classical epic. Once Da Gama has landed in India and made initial contact, the Samorim is deceived by his ministers. He accuses Da Gama of being a pirate and a vagabond, and not the ambassador he claims to be. Da Gama responds that he is indeed who he says he is. Otherwise, he adds, why would he bother to make up a narrative as complicated as the story of his travels, and why would he waste his time searching out such a distant land, lost on the map? "We conquered Fortune/ conquering the power of dead calms,/ of sudden and awesome tempests" ["vençemos a Fortuna,/...Rompendo a força do líquido estanho,/ Da tempestade horrífica et importuna"] (VIII.73). All he seeks, he says, is a sign—"um sinal" (VIII.73)—that he has made the trip, that he can take back home to show to his king. This logic partly persuades the Samorim that Da Gama is telling the truth. It helps as well that he is consumed by greed, "a cobiça do proveito" (VIII.77). He is already dreaming of the wealth he will receive through an agreement, a "contrato" (VIII.77) with the Portuguese.⁶

The sense that a fateful decision in the offing has been clear as early as stanza 44 of this same Canto VIII. As the Catual and his companions cease looking at the flags depicting Portuguese history they leave the ship, the poem tells us, "in the divided light of dusk" ("a luz...duvidosa"), to seek the repose that tired animals find in their lairs. This is, of course, yet another reference to Virgil's description of the moment of night fall when Dido takes her life: "it was night and over the earth weary creatures were tasting peaceful slumber" ["nox erat, et placidum carpebant fessa soporem corpora per terras" (IV.522)]. So we are at a kind of crossroads in the action of the poem. In Camões this is not followed by a scene of suicide, but by a scene of prophecy. The Samorim's soothsayers go to work trying to figure out what to make of these strange men, this "gente estranha" (VIII.45) who have come from the distant shores of unknown Spain,

⁵Erasmus 46ff. Whether Erasmus was known to Camões is a matter of debate among scholars of the *Lusiads*. For the vigils of Tasso's Goffredo, see the *Gerusalemme liberata*, VIII, 75-78, and, especially, XIII, 50, where Goffredo worries in a great "tempest of thought" ["in gran tempesta di pensieri"]—before praying for rain.

⁶For an account of the diplomatic negotiations that underpin the poem see Hampton Chapter 5.

“ignota Espanha.” And though the soothsayers are generally a false-telling group, we are assured, noted for their “falsa opinião” (VIII.45) here they are given a prophetic vision which comes from the Devil, but which, paradoxically, is true. “The Devil gave them a true sign,/ that the newcomers would indeed impose a perpetual yoke, /eternal bondage, destroying the people and their power” [“Sinal lhe mostra o Demo, verdadeiro,/ De como a nova gente lhe seria/ Jugo perpétuo, eterno cativo, Destruição de gente et de valia”] (VIII.46). This “true sign” points ahead to the moment, 8 stanzas later, when we are told that Da Gama hopes to take a “sign” of his trip back to Portugal. The image of the “yoke” or “jugo perpétuo” imposed on the Indians is echoed in that same moment, where we are also told that Da Gama knows the Portuguese king will come to “reduce to his yoke and to Christ’s faith” [“a seu jugo e lei someteria/ Das terras e do mar a redondeza”] (VIII.57) all of India. In short, we are given a prophecy by a group of hapless, false-saying soothsayers, who are inspired by the Devil. Yet that prophecy, as the poem itself tells us, is true. This means that Da Gama’s course of action will have both theological and historical implications. It will turn the evil desires of the demon against him by sweeping them up into the forward movement of Portuguese history. Infernal visitations will be reduced to so many details in a grand imperial project.

Following his engagement with the Catual, Da Gama seeks to return to his ship, but the Samorim’s ministers refuse to give him a boat until the following day, encouraging him instead to move the fleet closer to the harbor. He retires, but he cannot sleep.

As the reflected light from a mirror
 Of burnished steel or lovely crystal,
 A ray of sunlight, perhaps, glancing
 Sideways to focus somewhere else,
 Is directed by the idle hand
 Of a curious youngster, up
 Walls and across roof-tiles
 quivering, unquiet, here and there:
 So da Gama, held captive, let his mind
 Float...
 [Qual o reflexo lume do pulido
 Espelho de aço, ou de cristal fermoso,
 Que, do raio solar sendo ferido,
 Vai ferir noutra parte luminoso,
 E, sendo da oucioso mão movido,
 Pela casa, do moço curioso,

Anda pelas paredes e telhado,
 Trémulo, aqui e ali, et dessossedgao:
 Tal o vago juízo flutuava
 Do Gama preso...] (VIII.87-8)⁷

The floating mind of Aeneas—“curarum fluctuat aestu”—is here modified into the “vago juízo flutuava” of the captive Da Gama. The passive image of the light flickering in the bowl of bronze that we saw in Virgil here gives way to an active image of a curious child playing with a mirror—“a moço curioso.” The change is important, since Camões’s poem constantly values the faculty of curiosity. Camões gives us a childish figure of discovery who prefigures da Gama the leader of the curious Portuguese.

And curiosity leads to action. Whereas Virgil’s Aeneas worries without resolution, Da Gama comes up with a solution. Following this moment of reflection he recalls that by chance—“por caso” (VIII.88)—he has left his trusty sidekick Coelho on a nearby beach, with a set of boats. He secretly sends orders to Coelho to return to the fleet, and to move it away from the coast. In this way, says the poem, he could avoid being “attacked by the deceits he was expecting from the fierce Mohammedans” [“que não fosse salteado dos enganós/que esperava dos feros Maometanos”] (VIII.88).

There is, it would appear, a historical event underpinning this moment of epic rewriting. One of the most famous accounts of Da Gama’s voyage, the account attributed to Alvaro Velho, tells us that Da Gama and his men were in a standoff with the guards of the Catual when one of their own men, who had been lost in the crowd of onlookers pursuing the Europeans through the streets the previous day, reappears and informs Da Gama that, as of the night before, his lieutenant Coelho had landed with boats and was at the ready. Secretly, Alvaro Velho tells us, Da Gama sends an order to Coelho to return to the fleet and keep it away from the harbor. “We were all in agreement with this,” adds Alvaro.⁸

Thus Camões deploys Virgil for strategic purposes, both thematically and poetically. For one thing, he uses the Virgilian figure of the sleepless Aeneas to rewrite Alvaro’s account. He turns Alvaro’s depiction of a group of frightened captives, exchanging ideas about what to do, into a scene of military tactics, with the single epic hero replacing the collective body of anonymous soldiers. Second, Camões

⁷Here I have modified White’s translation to make it more literal.

⁸I quote from *Voyages de Vasco de Gama* 144.

rewrites Virgil to change the nature of epic anxiety. Whereas Aeneas considers the preparations for war in Latium by turning his mind in all directions—"in partibus varias"—Da Gama deploys a specific faculty, the faculty of memory, that calls to mind Coelho's presence in the bay. Indeed, he blends this moment of recollection with a sense of foresight, as he is expecting deceits from the Indians. In short, Da Gama uses his Virgilian moment of insomnia to engage in a form of political calculation that we might associate more with the Machiavellian prince than the son of Anchises and Venus. Seizing occasion—"por caso"—if not by the forelock then by the prow, he foresees the tricks of his enemies and commands his men to row away and avoid an ambush. Thus Camões both rewrites Virgil's canonical evocation of the watchful, worrying captain to carry out two poetic operations at once. On the one hand, he turns anonymous chronicle history into epic. On the other hand, he reconfigures classic epic insomnia as clever early modern military strategy.

However the Virgilian moment resonates in even larger ways across Camões's poem. As noted earlier Aeneas's momentary anxiety gives way to troubled sleep: "Aeneas, his heart troubled by woeful war, stretched him on the bank under the sky's chill cope, and let late sleep steal over his limbs" ["Aeneas, tristi turbatus pectora bello, / procubuit seramque dedit per membra quietem"] (VIII.29-30). He is visited by the god of the river Tiber, who seems to appear from within the leaves of riverbank and offers Aeneas both assurance that he will be successful—"Not doubtful is my prophecy" ("haud incerta cano" [49])—and advice to seek out an alliance with the Latins, the ancient indigenous people of the peninsula. He then suddenly vanishes, and Aeneas rises ("night and sleep left Aeneas"; "nox Aenean somnusque reliquit" [65]) to offer a prayer and begin his task.

This moment, too, is replayed in Camões. In Canto IV, Da Gama puts in at Malindi, on the east coast of Africa. There, like Aeneas in Carthage and Odysseus in Thaiakia, he recounts for the Sultan and his court the story of his journey so far. Earlier Portuguese travelers had ventured far from Iberia, he notes, reaching the land of Prester John, in Ethiopia, and venturing to the source of the Indus, where they died, for it is difficult to get back home ("Tornar-se fãcimente não podia" [IV.65]). This daring, we are told, never ceased to preoccupy the mind of the new Portuguese king, Manuel; indeed, he was "conquered" ("conquistador" [IV.67]) by it. One day, stretched upon his bed, at the hour when "imaginings are most certain" ("Onde imaginações mais certas são" [IV.68]) he has a dream of floating up to the spheres

and looking down on the earth.⁹ Suddenly two old men emerge from two rivers and walk towards him. They represent the Ganges and the Indus. And they prophecy the conquest of India by the Portuguese. They vanish as quickly as they came, and Manuel awakes, startled, but with a new idea in his mind: “cum novo espanto/ E grande alteração de pensamento” (IV.75). This idea is the project of Da Gama’s journey. Eight lines later, Da Gama has been commissioned by the king and given his orders: “Manuel the Fortunate laid in these very hands/ The key to this pursuit of unknown lands” [“Me põe o ínclito rei nas mãos a chave/ Deste cometimento grande e grave” (IV.77)].

Thus Camões splits the Virgilian moment in two. He scatters it across the landscape of his poem. The prophetic moment occurs in Canto IV and the moment of anxiety in Canto VIII; one is linked to the Portuguese king, the other to Da Gama. The implications of this splitting are suggestive for thinking about Camões’s relationship to his Virgilian prototype, and for thinking about the role of the heroic Da Gama. Virgil gives us a moment of metaphysical reassurance. The anxious Aeneas is shown filled with solicitude for the situation before him, before being assured that, in effect, destiny is on his side. He is, in fact, the answer to an ancient prophecy of deliverance. In Camões, by contrast, the prophecy is located in the mind of the king. It may be a true vision, or simply a dream of glory. Between that moment and the moment of the anxious Da Gama, waiting in captivity in India, there unfolds the entire journey of the *Lusiads*. In order to bring those two moments together—to reassemble the imperial project of the *Aeneid*, as it were—the Portuguese must undertake their great enterprise and brave the trials of the circumnavigation of Africa. In other words, Da Gama’s Virgilian insomnia is itself the proof of the veracity of Manuel’s dream. Through the captain’s bravery, the king’s vision is shown to be prophetic, and not merely delusional. Whereas in Virgil the prophecy is the consequence of a divine visitation—a river God—in Camões the validity of the vision must be acted out in history, through human courage and cunning. As Camões rewrites Virgil he replaces imperial-metaphysical certainty with the uncertainties of action in history. Da Gama’s sagacious turn to his memory to outwit the Indians demonstrates turns supernatural vision into military tactics. Thus, despite the poem’s often noted invocations to

⁹The brief moment of a glance down at the earth from above rewrites yet another set of classical texts, Cicero’s visionary *On the Dream of Scipio* and Lucian’s satirical dialogue *Icaromenippus*. The presence of the Cicero text elsewhere in Camões’s poem is noted by Costa Ramalho 19-21.

both Christian and pagan deities, the *Lusiads* articulates a shift from a world governed by divine agency to a world governed by human strategy and military tactics. And it does so through the dynamics of literary history, through citation and dialogue among diverse epic forms. This is how modern empires are made, not through prophecy but through cunning—both military and poetic.¹⁰

The slide from metaphysics into epic history has implications as well for the depiction of Da Gama. Aeneas worries, but his worries are soon allayed by the prophecy of the river god. However in Camões, the insomniac moment becomes the pretext for the modern sea captain to demonstrate his mastery of events, even as the modern epic poet turns historical detail into epic action. The epic hero is singled out, but his singularity involves tactical wisdom instead of hand-to-hand combat. In the world of mercantile negotiation, scientific discovery, and political intrigue that is late-sixteenth century Europe, Camões recasts a key epic moment as a turning point in his own poem, showcasing the role of military strategy in effective action.

Given the power of the Virgilian description of Aeneas's insomnia to raise issues about action, reflection, and knowledge, we should not be surprised to find it picked up in one of Camões's more self-reflective contemporaries, to whom I turn in closing as a way of contextualizing the *Lusiads*. In what appears to be one of the earliest of his *Essays*, the chapter called "Of Idleness," or "De l'oisiveté," Michel de Montaigne writes of his recent decision to retire from public life and turn his attention to himself. Montaigne builds the first version of this very brief essay, published in 1580, around two quotations, one from the opening of Horace's *Ars Poetica*, in which the poet compares bad poetry to a sick man's dreams, and one from Lucan's *Pharsalia*, in which we are told that idle soldiers can be easily enflamed by rhetoric to acts of valor. Montaigne glosses these citations by noting that minds are like farmland. You must plant them or they will go to weeds. Like the womb of the female, they must be fertilized, or they will produce shapeless creations. "The soul that has no established goal becomes lost," says Montaigne, "for, as they say, to be everywhere is to be nowhere" ["L'ame qui n'a point de but estably, elle se perd: car, comme on dict, c'est n'estre en aucun lieu, que d'estre par tout"] (Montaigne 34).¹¹

¹⁰For a still useful account of Camões's imperial poetics, with good insights about his "independent" relationship to Virgil, see Bowra Chapter 3. On the role of Renaissance epic as a mediation between theological doctrine and political structure see the classic essay by Durling.

¹¹Translation by me.

As we know, Montaigne continually augmented the *Essays* by returning to them after they were published and inserting new text, which became the subsequent edition of the book. Here, when he revises the essay for the 1588 edition of the book, Montaigne adds in the line from Martial's epigrams that I have just quoted from his French—to be everywhere is to be nowhere (“*Quisquis ubique habitat, Maxime, nusquam habitat*”). In the first version he inserted the Martial quip in French, as if it were a proverb, before going back and citing the actual line in Latin, thereby revealing his sources. At the same moment of rewriting he inserts into the text the second half of the Virgilian passage with which I began: “as when, in a bowl of bronze, a flickering light from water, flung back by the sun or the moon’s glittering form, flits far and wide o’er all things, and now mounts high and smites the fretted ceiling of the roof aloft.” Montaigne here becomes Aeneas, just as Da Gama becomes Aeneas, his mind bouncing about, seeking a solution to his dilemma. Yet whereas Virgil’s scene of insomnia seems to be a kind of worry about the bellicose behavior of the youth of Latium, and Camões’s version depicts Da Gama—not wandering idly, but looking for a specific way out, outsmarting the traps of the Indians—Montaigne’s Virgil becomes the figure for the mind with no other object of contemplation than itself. The figure of reflection adduced here is perfectly apt. Montaigne’s own contemplation of himself is depicted as a scene of bouncing light. And that same dynamic of reflection is inscribed into the form of the essay itself. For Montaigne’s very insertion of this passage comes as a result of him rereading his own earlier version of the same chapter. The first version of the essay becomes the surface of the water off of which the wandering mind bounces. The result of that bouncing is the quotation of a passage about a bouncing mind. Thus the very material history of the essay reflects the structure of the image that is adduced to describe the wandering of consciousness. Furthermore, that image of bouncing answers the earlier citation of Lucan, included in the first version. The Lucan passage (“*variam semper dant otia mentem*”) asserts that idleness leads to indecision. However it appears in the midst of Curio’s exhortation to his men to enter battle, in Book IV of the *Pharsalia*; the second half of the phrase is “snatch from them by battle the power to form a plan” (“*eripe consilium pugna*”).¹² Writing in the midst of the French wars of religion, Montaigne answers Lucan, the great poet of civil war, with Virgil, the ironic poet of empire. Even more impor-

¹²See Lucan’s *Pharsalia* 704-05. For an account of “*De l’oisiveté*” that focuses on Montaigne’s displacement of tropes of religious meditation see Krause 149-53.

tant, he answers an image of fevered political rhetoric in the service of civil unrest with an image of the mind revising its own language, rewriting itself as it accepts its own mutability. In the rewriting of the essay Montaigne takes us from the inflamed public rhetoric of civil war to solitary meditation.

I have suggested that in the late sixteenth century, at a moment of crisis in heroic models inherited from Antiquity, both Montaigne and Camões turn to a powerful image of the epic hero as reflective thinker. And both use the Virgilian moment of Aeneas's insomnia— itself a rewriting of Dido's earlier insomnia before suicide—as way into reflecting on the larger projects of their own texts and on the nature of heroic action. For Camões, the space between the dream of Manuel, in Canto IV, and Da Gama's reflective moment in Canto VIII becomes the space of history itself, as the contrast between the prophecy and its execution impose upon Da Gama the exercise of courage and cunning. The rewriting of Virgil in Canto VIII stresses the importance of military sagacity and careful calculation over violence in the pursuit of epic enterprise. For Montaigne, it is the project of writing itself that takes precedence, as the reflective essayist displaces the feverish rhetoric of political action into a strategy of writing and rewriting the self.¹³

University of California, Berkeley

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