CHAPTER VI

EPIC OR HISTORY?

STRUCTURE OF OS LUSIADAS

One of the most important aspects of Os Lusiadas that remains yet to be examined, is its generic form, namely, the epic structure in Camões’s historical imagination. In its form, modeled after especially the classical epic of Virgil, Os Lusiadas maintains almost all the features of a literary epic. However, though the form of Os Lusiadas appears to be that of an epic, a close examination would show that the source for Camões’s epic was not merely literature of Virgil and others but more importantly, history sieved from chroniclers, but selected and arranged to suit his purpose. Therefore, it turns out to be an occasion to study the way Camões has supplied these poetic elements with material from history. As a result, with the shifting of the centres between the nature of being a product of literary imagination and the structure of writing history, Os Lusiadas has come to reveal its elements of epic structure interspersed with the nature of history, too. When one attempts an examination of the structure of Os Lusiadas, conclusions do not seem to fix definitively either in favour of epic or in favour of history. In other words, the structural nucleus of Os Lusiadas seems to shift constantly between epic and history, literary imagination and historical construct.
According to Encyclopedia Britannica, as is described in an article by Professor Rhys Carpenter, epic is "a term which is applied with little rigour to a form of narrative verse, distinguished by its length and by its elevated style. It is impossible to give a more exact definition, for epic varies from age to age and from one language to another" (qtd. in Livermore, "Camões", 81). According to Harold V. Livermore, the word, 'epic' was never used by Camões (81). Its first use in Spain was in the year of Camões's death, 1580. However, from the first verse itself, it is clear that Camões was trying to write a poem on Virgilian terms. But, for his contemporaries, he was as lyric poet or a poet of heroic verse, even with regard to his masterpiece, Os Lusiadas.

There is no doubt that the primary form of Os Lusiadas appears to be one of an epic manifesting almost all the characteristics of the genre. As many classical epics demonstrate, an important feature of Os Lusiadas is the invocation. The invocation in Camões's work is made primarily to the nymphs of the river Tagus though the first address (III: 1, 2) is made to the epic muse in Aeneid: "Agora tu, Caliope, me ensina / O que contou ao Rei o ilustre Gama" (III: 1). This is not done just once; for the poet seeks the help for inspiration from the nymphs of Tagus again at the end of Canto seven, where he bewails of writers' block, poverty, exile and even the shipwreck he had to survive (VII:78-87). He refers to the shipwreck again in Canto X: 128 where he implies that he actually had to retrieve the draft of this epic from the clutches of the waves. This was, as historians pinpoint, in 1559 when the ship he was sailing sunk in the mouth of Mekong River (X:127) in Cambodia and
the author swam ashore, clutching the script of *Os Lusiadas* while he lost all other possessions. Invocation is part of epic imagination, but in Camões’s hands, even the customary invocation is not bereft of history. One can see the convergence of imagination and history in the invocation, in his linking of Calliope with Vasco da Gama in the first line itself.

He suffers the writer’s block (“Que o meu fraco batel se alague cedo....”, VII: 78) perhaps because thematically the poem has reached its climax in Canto VII where the Portuguese makes the historic landfall in Calicut and have had already the necessary communication with the authorities in the land. However, the poet needs to record the post-Gama history of Portuguese interaction/intervention with the Indian coast, for which he needs further revitalization. Thus, though a poet, he is engaged in recording the nation’s memory “Para porem as coisas em memória, / Que merecerem ter eterna glória!” (VII: 82) for praising further achievements of the Portuguese, “Onde feitos diversos engrandeça” (VII: 83). By the end of the Canto, he is able to recollect the chief tenets of his conception of history, namely, faith in God and loyalty to the king/nation:

*Aqueles sós direi, que aventuraram*

*Por seu Deus, por seu Rei, a amada vida,*

Onde, perdendo-a, em fama a dilataram,

Tão bem de suas obras merecida.

Apolo, e as Musas que me acompanharam.
Me dobrarão a fúria concedida,

Enquanto eu tomo alento descansado,

Por tornar ao trabalho, mais folgado.’ (VII: 87, emphasis added)

Virgil’s epic muse Calliope is again invoked for a short span, but for “My joy in writing which is failing me” (X: 8) has reasons which are autobiographical. It is deeply moving and painful that in spite of the fact that it is sorrows that await him at the close of his days, he prays for the blessing that he might offer the remaining strength for singing for “à nação minha!” (X : 9).

*Dedication*, which is a major feature of an epic is made in Os Lusiadas in the initial stanzas of Canto I itself (I: 6-18). The dedication is done to a real person, his own King, D. Sebastião. Not only that these stanzas are pregnant with historical references to the Battle of Ourique (1139), many victories of Afonso I, those of João I, those kings who secured Portugal’s modern frontiers, and many soldiers and Viceroyos who served in Portuguese India, but the very dedication to King Sebastião indicates a historical anxiety of the time regarding the young king who was enthroned at the age of fourteen. To quote Landeg White,

The only grandson of João III, and the sole means of preventing the Portuguese crown passing to Philip II of Spain, his wildness, fanaticism, and lack of interest in women are reflected in Camões’s eulogy, which is a masterpiece of controlled anxiety – praising the young king for what he is yet to accomplish, urging him to ‘anticipate
his maturity’ and setting him the example of his illustrious ancestors. Even his duty to marry is hinted at in the reference to Tethys who is preparing the ‘World’s Green Oceans’ as a dowry (st.16). (229)

Many stanzas in the poem which otherwise may seem to be mere digressions read like laws of seduction targeted (conjured up) directly to the young King who put the safety of his nation at great risk with his lack of worldly wisdom, especially a lack of interest to marry. Lionardo Ribeiro's frustration in not being able to realize consummation in love appears to be indirectly targeting the King: “Ser com amores mal afortunado, / Porém não que perdesse a esperança / De ainda poder seu fado ter mudança” (IX: 75). In the subsequent stanzas the poet sings the story of awakening of desire till his nymph fell in rapture at her victor’s feet (X: 82). The Isle of Love, though its meanings are manifold, with its uncensored and explicit description of female body and love-making, points towards its obvious target as one who denied the lovely female form (IX: 26). This historical anxiety of the nation regarding the immaturity of a king that might cause the passing of the throne to Spain takes the form of a final appeal the poet makes to the King in the closing stanzas of the epic (X: 145-156) He even begs the king to take note of other nations (X: 146), gives advice and warning regarding the people around him and the state of the nation that ignores the lessons of the past for the future, being given over to avarice and philistinism, heartlessness and degrading pessimism (X: 145).
The next important requirement of an epic is that it should have a noble hero. At a glance the hero in *Os Lusíadas* appears to be Vasco da Gama who is not a mythical hero who is encountered in common classical epics, but a historical figure (1469-1524). He is presented as honourable, noble and one who is able to take command of situations "determinava" (I: 44). He appears to be the hero in the epic with his unshakeable endurance and genius for success. To the governor of the Mozambique Island he declares his faith in Jesus Christ (I: 65, 66) and he consistently sees everything as work of Providence (II: 22). Though because of adverse wind and waves they could not cross the dangerous bar in Mombasa, soon, da Gama learns that if they had crossed they would have been caught by a 'treacherous people'; da Gama exclaims (II: 30, 31, 32). What makes da Gama noble is his obedience to his royal master (II: 83) because “'E porque é, de vassalos o exercício, / Que os membros tem regidos da cabeça'” (II: 84). Thus as the Portuguese envoy informs the King of Malindi, their Captain’s greatness consists in his great devotion to duty (II: 85). His dress which is described in II: 97, 98, which is modeled after Iberian style and the Sultan is moved by "espanto e admiração" (II: 101). He is presented throughout as "o sublime Gama" (III: 3). So no wonder da Gama appears to be the natural choice of King Manuel the Fortunate (IV: 77) for the task that needs great effort and endurance (IV: 78). Even then he does not place the trust in himself but in the Lord to whom he and his companions offer prayers at the chapel of Belém (IV: 87).
We see da Gama displaying grave authority (VII: 59) when he talks in great Samorin's court on the purpose of their arrival at the Malabar coast (VII: 60-63). When incited by his informers (VIII: 61) Samorin expresses his doubts regarding the true identity of the sailors and asks for gifts befitting a royal offering (VIII: 61-63), da Gama gives a convincing answer satisfying all the queries of the Samorin (VIII: 65-75). When da Gama learns that his return to the ship is purposefully delayed by Catual, he thinks not of himself but regains his presence of mind and sends word to Nicolau Coelho (captain of the Caravel Berrio, IV: 82) cautioning him to return to the fleet (VIII: 88). Da Gama's ability to act according to the vicissitudes of alien cultures is indeed praiseworthy. When Catual puts forward the new demand for the Portuguese merchandise to be brought on shore, da Gama realizes that the goods meant his own ransom. As he calculated in his mind, as soon as the merchandise is brought ashore, he is given the boat to return to his fleet (VIII: 95).

Da Gama's ability for timely decision and action is visible many a time. As he learns that the Portuguese factors – Alvaro de Braga, the clerk, and Diogo Dias, the overseer (VIII: 94) – were purposefully detained in the land so that the entire Portuguese fleet would be anchored till the threatening Arabian fleet from Mecca (in fact, Mocha) would arrive (IX: 4), he sensed the impending danger and orders the factors to retreat to the ship (IX: 8). But in their attempt to escape, the factors were caught and as soon as da Gama learns it, he seized the Malabari merchants (who had come to the ship to trade their wares) as hostages (IX: 9). His timely action proves to be effective for, the
Samorin set the Portuguese factors free, overruling opposition from the Muslims (IX: 12). It is significant that da Gama and his companions never found the natives of Malabar as adverse or unfavourable. Even during the few uncertain days da Gama’s fleet were in Calicut, an amiable trade relationship between the natives and the Portuguese had already developed as the lines in IX: 9 shows. He found only the Catual as avaricious, corrupt, and ignoble (VIII: 96).

Camões considers da Gama obviously as the protagonist and the leader among the Portuguese sailors. While other sailors are given unnamed nymphs as companions in the Isle of Love, it is Tethys, their leader herself, offers herself to him (IX: 85, 87). To da Gama is ‘foretold’ the major part of the later history of the Portuguese overseas expansion, including his second voyage to India (X: 53), his death (X: 54) and the service of his son in India (X: 62).

It is equally significant that Camões does not create his Vasco da Gama above humans. Da Gama is presented as thoroughly human and historical. In his voyage to India, he is often seen as worn out and with weary eyes from the anxious watch of many nights in the ocean (II: 60). What saves him from complete despair must have been his trust in the Providence to whom he makes ardent prayers: “Chama aquele remédio santo e forte, / Que o impossível pode, desta sorte” (VI: 80). Camões, in fact, invests his protagonist with human frailty which in its turn requires da Gama to submit
himself in complete trust to God (IV: 87). As has been the general stand of the present work, one is not encouraged to look for the so-called objective details from an equally competitive and objective biography of Vasco da Gama. For, such a definitive biography of the ‘discoverer of the Orient’ is considered still elusive.

Francis A. Dutra who says that the definitive biography of Vasco da Gama is yet to be written, considers Luís Adão da Fonseca’s Vasco da Gama O Homem, a Viagem, a Época (1997) and Sanjay Subrahmanyam’s The Career and Legend of Vasco da Gama (1997) as deserving careful reading. In his, “A New Look at the Life and Career of Vasco da Gama”, Francis A. Dutra gives a succinct description of the hero’s life and career. “The date and place of Vasco da Gama’s birth is not known with certainty though most authors believe he was born in the Portuguese fishing village of Sines in the Alentejo probably in the late 1460s” (23). Little is known for certain about his career before the voyage to India. However, “The sixteenth-century Portuguese chronicler Damião de Gois described Vasco da Gama as ‘an unmarried man of the right age to bear up under the strains of such a voyage’ ” (24). On his return from the voyage, Vasco da Gama began to be lavishly rewarded by King Manuel I. However, da Gama continued to be ambitious of ever new titles of nobility though he was not often successful in his attempts. As Dutra says, “…Vasco da Gama began to take this failure to obtain the senhorio with poor grace. There was friction and at least one violent incident between the servants of da Gama and those of D. Luís de Noronha” (26). Da
Gama married sometime in 1501 and his wife’s name was D. Catarina de Ataide. They had seven children. Da Gama’s second voyage to India (in fact the fourth Portuguese expedition) was between 1502 and 1503. Dutra speaks of the human frailties in Vasco da Gama:

Upon his return, da Gama continued to become involved in ugly incidents over the lordship of Sines. Full details are not known but all evidence is that Vasco was making a nuisance of himself in Sines. The Venetian Lunardo da Cá Masser, who had been stationed at the Portuguese court, writing in 1506, perceptively described Vasco as ‘an intemperate man, without any reason’. In 1507, as a result of da Gama’s behaviour, King Manuel felt obliged to order Vasco, his wife, and his entire household to leave Sines, which was under the jurisdiction of D. Jorge as Master of the Order of Santiago, and never to return without D. Jorge’s permission. (26)

However, being sent by King João III (r.1521-1557), Vasco da Gama had a third, but final voyage to India, sailed from Lisbon on 9 April 1524. He was given the title of Viceroy of India. As Dutra concludes the short life sketch of da Gama, “His administration was an energetic but short one, lasting less than four months. He died in Cochin on Christmas Eve of 1524” (27).

Vasco da Gama is still regarded a great ‘hero’ (one may quickly add such epithets as ‘legendary’, ‘mythical’, ‘fictional’, etc.) of Portuguese empire
in the East. It only matters from which angle he is looked at. In the words of Bowra,

‘His qualities are subtler and more practical. His genius is for success, and despite reverses and accidents, despite his own mistakes and miscalculations, he succeeds and reaches India. . . . He is a new kind of hero, with something of the astuteness of Odysseus and the perseverance of Aeneas, but these are not his chief claims. What counts most is that he is a great servant of Portugal...’(qtd. Santos, 134)

That Camões blends the historical with the legendary, is a matter beyond doubt. It is the beauty of the poem and even the essential nature of the literariness of epic that Vasco da Gama can be looked at from different angles ranging from a superhuman epic hero to a week and frail person whom the times entrusted the responsibility of a dangerous expedition. This also means that, as Os Lusiadas itself suggests, the credit of the first successful voyage to the Orient should go to persons and companions equally heroic and human like Vasco da Gama.

As João Camilo dos Santos remarks, the deeds of the protagonists in Camões’s epic, “constitute an extraordinary achievement with remarkable consequences for the history of humanity. Os Lusiadas is an epic, despite the fact that its heroes are human and fallible. And it is certainly this that makes continued reading of the poem even today, an enriching and elevation
Thus, though the poet assures that da Gama's title, fame, and exploits in war (V: 99) will be the subject of immortal verses, in the next stanza, he suggests to say that the subject of his epic work will not be just the feats of an individual; for, unless the service of an individual is not dedicated to the nation, he will not attain honour. So the subject of Camões's muses is made clear: "De dar a todo o Lusitano feito / Seu louvor... (V: 100), in which it is the Portuguese that is stressed, with not so much of emphasis on any particular individual as much as the achievement for the sake of the building of the nation.

In this way the specialty of Camões's vision is divulged still further in that a person, however great he is, should become thoroughly un-self-centered by becoming part of the Portuguese achievements (V: 100). A hint to this effect is already given when the poet symbolically describes the attire of the Portuguese sailors, saying how the colour of their clothes blended together to form a single rainbow; the occasion is when the sailors meet the Sultan of Malindi (II: 99).

The every opening line of Camões's epic imitates Virgil's, Aeneid but just there itself the poet makes it clear that different from Virgil's epic, the present poet's subject is going to be the achievements not of one man but of the Lusitanians. William J. Entwistle notes the difference made in the initial lines of Virgil and Camões: while the former refers to the singular, the latter assigns the achievements to a plural entity. In the words of Entwistle, "I sing:
As armas e os bardes (in the plural) and not [Virgil's] arma virumque cano [in the singular]" (83). As he puts it in Canto I: 3, "... eu canto o peito ilustre lusitano". According to the vision of Camões, one becomes the hero of his epic, not because he stands out as nobler than all others but because he has dedicated his whole self honourably, for the making of the nation. Indeed the very title of Camões's epic, Os Lusiadas is suggestive of this fact. Thus, as many Camonians like William J. Entewistle, have remarked, Camões was "not curios to develop in Da Gama a marked personality... [for] Although present throughout, Gama is, however, not prominent" (81). To quote Entwistle again, even the Portuguese are not themselves. [but] they are what they stand for...He takes for his subject a whole nation, and as a result his epic, like Milton's Paradise Lost (sic), is without a hero...The hero of the epic is the Lusiads, as the title and both the introductory verses declare, and the whole narrative proclaims...It is the nation, not Da Gama, who discovers India, and to whom he resigns his individuality. (81-83)

In this manner, the whole of Os Lusiadas is peopled with heroes as honourable as da Gama. Nuno Álvares Pereira, for instance, is a hero (in the Battle of Aljubarrota) because he projected not himself but the people (IV: 45). Or, to recount the case of another, Fernando, one of the gifted sons of João I, who was captured in Tangier in 1437 and died in captivity rather than surrender Ceuta is a hero in the epic; for he loved the country more than his
own life: Só por amor da pátria está passando / A vida de senhora feita escrava, / Por não se dar por ele a forte Ceita: / Mais o público bem que o seu respeita” (IV: 52).

In the historical narration of Vasco da Gama addressed to the Sultan of Malindi or those of Paulo da Gama given to the Catual, the reader realizes that Portugal is a nation made up of heroes, ‘os Lusiadas’, rather than a single hero. In Canto Ten, Tethys calls Vasco da Gama a hero, but she addresses the vision to him and his men together (X: 76). While at the Isle of Love, either in the nymph’s singing of history, (X: 6-74) or in Tehty’s ‘prophecy’ of the future history (X:75-142), there is no hero projected singularly, but only the Portuguese en masse. Portugal’s overseas empire is a story that of what the Portuguese bought with their blood (X: 132). In this way, the poet himself is one of the heroes in Os Lusiadas, for he is also included where he describes the ideal Portuguese (X: 145:156). In the consideration of the hero of the epic, one can see the myth and history go hand in hand. In the words of Norwood H. Andrews, Jr., Camões who emphasized national unity....was aware that a tiny nation whose resources were spread out across the face of the earth and waters had to act collectively if it was to survive. ... The high point of Camões’ narrative, so far as the facts with which he worked are concerned, is the arrival of the fleet at Calecute. Because he was limited by those facts, he could not prove with any Homeric list of ships and chieftains
that the journey’s completion was the realization of a collective effort by all the Portuguese and one more event in a chain stretching back to Lusus in myth and Afonso Henriques in reality. He could do so symbolically, however, and this is the meaning and purpose of his catalogue of the fleets’ banners. (90, emphasis added)

The aesthetic reading of Os Lusiadas, as Armando Castro asserts, seems to take one to the social dimension of the epic as well as the need to view history itself aesthetically. Castro borrows the expression “as estruturas significativas” (significant structures) from Lucien Goldman, the author of Le Dieu Cache to explain the structural/aesthetic unity as he sees in Camões’s work. According to Castro, the organic unity which is based on diverse components show that at the centre of the poem is not the voyage of Vasco da Gama and his fleet, nor the attempt of the Portuguese people of the 16th century to build an interrelationship with other peoples, by creating a condition of civilization to progress. On the other hand, the message of the poem is more general and universal; that is to say, the action of the poem is rather alive permanently, and the action rests on the ‘social being’ or a gregarious being who seeks to establish a relationship with man as well as nature. According to Castro, such a concern was already there in the 16th century, and therefore, one should look for in Camões’s epic not any internal aesthetic ‘contradiction’ but ‘contradiction’ objectively existing in the Portuguese society in the 16th century (99). This is reflected in the interrelationship of different peoples on earth, creating a condition of progress.
in civilization. This is the contribution the Portuguese made to the world, as far as the aesthetic conception of the poem is considered. To quote Armando Castro,

Este é um elemento central porém condicionado por outro ainda mais geral e de significado universalista ainda bem mais amplo – trata-se da caracterização do ser humano como ser específico que se constrói a si mesmo na aventura, numa acção permanente, agindo na dupla vertente da intervenção sobre a natureza e sobre a sua própria condição, de ente gregário, de ente que existe e só existe socialmente. (98, emphasis added)

This need to view history aesthetically is made evident in the essay, “Constants of the History of Portugal”, by the historian, Jorge Borges de Macedo. The essay was prepared in 1981, on the occasion of the centenary of the Papal Bull, Manifestis probatum. In spite of the various vicissitudes in the history of Portugal, Macedo thinks that there are certain ‘constants’ or universals that pervade the entire Portuguese history. Some of them are.

(i) “the undeniable and unadulterable will to political independence” (108)

(ii) “a profound and unadulterable confidence in our capacity to conquer and maintain that independence”

(iii) “the capacity to bring forth leaders” (109)
ability to effect “a series of original and corrective political modifications”

“our infinite patience and ability to wait which has nothing to do with the passivity”

“the social mobility within the Portuguese community” (110)

“the indifference of the Portuguese towards the class struggle”, but a concentration on the progress

“The national solutions were always those of unity and convergence, never of hatred and division”

“the discovery of the World and the building of nations – our fundamental vocation” (111)

This is the historical aesthetic presented by the historian Macedo. It is important that Macedo emphasizes the social and national commitment of the Portuguese. It is still more significant, as far as the present discussion of Camões’s epic is concerned, that Macedo relates his vision to the first Portuguese explorers who, by extension, included Vasco da Gama (from history) and Camões (from epic). In the words of Macedo, “Had we applied to the ships that went to India the principle of cision (sic) over that of unity, never would we have arrived or remained there” (111). Finally, it may be specially remarked that Macedo’s vision, like that of Camões, is linked to a ‘theology’ of history, where the concerns of the Church and the nation converge, for Macedo concludes his essay with the following note:

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The Bull ‘Manifestis probatum’ was right in recognizing our national maturity which has shown itself to be vigorous, determined and enlightened. Here we are, independent, to say so eight hundred years after the concession of our independence by the worthy Holy See. We are independent and deserve to be. As was the case eight hundred years ago. (112)

The title of Camões’s work, which is significantly in the plural, comes from the ancient Roman name for Portugal, namely Lusitania which is derived from Lusus, companion of Bacchus and supposedly the legendary founder of Portugal (III: 21). Such a mythical immemorial origin of Lusitania is referred to again and again at various occasions in the poem (VI: 26, VI: 30, VII: 77 and VIII: 2-4). On one occasion the poet speaks of the modern name Portugal and its origin from the city of Porto (VI: 52). Paul Mazery speaks of the common assumptions regarding the title of the epic: “The title, The Lusiads, refers to the Portuguese people. Lusitania was a Roman province largely corresponding to the Portugal of today. Camões therefore calls the Portuguese the Lusiads, the people of Lusus, son of Bacchus, legendary founder of Lusitania” (14).

Many of the Camonians identify the origin of the word, ‘Os Lusiadas’ in the writings of André de Resende, the Portuguese humanist and author who died in 1573. Américo de Costa Ramalho, in the chapter “A Palavra Lusiadas” in his book, Estudos sobre o Século XVI (1980) says that even ten
years before the publication of *Os Lusiadas*, the word was in vogue, referring to the Portuguese people. Ramalho who thinks that the word comes from the nymphs of the brook by name Lucino or Lucido or Lousias (giving the nymphs the name Lousiades or Lusiadas, etc.), does not say where the particular brook is situated. He does not doubt the connection of the word with the mythical Lusus and Lusitania. His conclusion is that it was first used by the Latin poet Marco Varrão (116-27 B.C.) from whom the word comes to Pliny, to go to the Portuguese Resende (who was then writing in Latin) and then to Camões. Ramalho’s conclusion is assertive: “Na realidade, nada há que anule a afirmação de André de Resende, de que foi ele o criador da palavra *Lusiadas*” (230).

However, many Camonians found it incongruous that the masculine ‘Os’ accompanies the feminine-sounding ‘Lusiadas’. B. Xavier Coutinho who studied the issue at great length, thinks that the word was practically unknown at the time of the publication of *Os Lusiadas* (15). The question from where the word originated was the subject of constant studies particularly since 1904, especially by D. Carolina Michaëlis de Vasconcelos and Dr. José Maria Rodrigues. Their common conclusion was that Camões got it from the Portuguese writer L. André de Resende who had used the expression in two of his poems in 1531 (15). The English historian and biographer of the poet, Aubrey F.G. Bell, maintains the same view:
'Ocorre num poema latino de André de Resende, Vincentius Levita et Martyr (1545), e no seu Encomium Erasmi, escrito, mas não publicado, em 1531; ocorre ainda num poema latino de Jorge Coelho, escrito talvez em 1526, mas alterado, antes da sua publicação em 1536; e é também empregado duas vezes por Manuel da Costa (cerca de 1537).'

(qtd. Coutinho, 15)

However, Coutinho claims that he himself encountered the expression in question in a Greek writer by name, Ateneu de Náucratis of the third century B.C. and another Greek professor Fernand Chapouthier found the word in a Greek writing of the IV-III century B.C. Both of these Greek authors used the expression to refer to the river-nymphs of the river Lousios in Greece. Portugal was then known among Greek and Latin writers as Lusitania or Lysitania signifying that the people of that land originated from the mythical Luso or Lysa. In fact, Camões speaks of both the terms in his epic, III: 21. While the Greeks used the term Lusiadas / Lysiadas, the Latin writers used Lusiadae / Lysiadae, to refer to the nymphs of the Greek river Lousios. Since, the phonetic and graphic similarities between Lusiadas and Lusitania are too apparent – though semantically incongruous – the Latin writers began to use the term Lusiadas / Lysiadas for referring to the nymphs of Lousios as well as the people of Lusitania. It is with this dual connotation many writers (though for Resende, it meant only the people of Lusitania) ranging from 3rd century B.C. to 16th century A.D. applied the term. Camões just picked up the term and used it as a synonym for Lusitanos, for the title. It is significant that he
has not used it anywhere in the text. However, from the time of Camões's use (1572), its primary Grego-Latin sense (nymphs of Lousios) seems to have lost, and it came to be used only to mean 'the Portuguese people'. Between the first appearance of the epic and its first grand critical edition of Mateus (1817), the attempt was mainly to maintain respectfully more of Camões's title rather than other options. However, some of the later editors, influenced by the prestigious titles of Eneida and Iliada, preferred A Lusiada, a tendency to continue chiefly till 1815. B. Xavier Coutinho concludes the arguments of his study by summing up his chief findings, thus:

‘a) a palavra Lusiadas, como tal, é grega; foi o nome de umas ninfas do rio Lousios, encontrando-se na obra de Ateneu de Náucratis e Timeu de Tauromenium (séc. III a. C.);

b) por um fenómeno de captação mudou, semânticamente, de sentido e deixou de estar ligada às ninfas e ao rio Lousios, para pertencer à família de Lusus e Lusitania;

c) passou a ser exuberante e exclusivamente empregada, para designar os Lusitanos pelos humanistas portugueses dos sécs. XVI-XVII;

d) por fim, com Camões (1572), ao aproveitá-la para o título do seu poema, entrou, triunfante, na língua portuguesa e na literatura universal. (19)

It is also the requirement of an epic that it should tell a story of **extraordinary deeds.** The extraordinary deed in Camões’s epic is the first
ever expedition the Portuguese so successfully conducted to India by seas. The first voyage to India is but a powerful symbol in the poem, of all that the Portuguese achieved throughout its history from the very beginning of its formation. Thus, as the fleet with Vasco da Gama as Captain sails to India, there is record of various other voyages and expeditions which the Lusitanians conduct in *Os Lusiadas* – all but narrated through the voices of Vasco da Gama, Paulo da Gama, Tethys and others. As Camões’s work belongs to sixteenth century, quite in tune with historical times, the story of the epic turns out to be, chiefly, a story of Portuguese overseas empire building and expansion.

*Long wars*, in those days, were a subject of admiration as the words of the Sultan of Malindi denote (II: 103). In his words, the battles were famous, splendid (I: 108) and therefore, he requests the captain to list all the wars the Lusitanians fought, from the beginning: “Co’os sucessos das guerras do começo” (II: 109). Thus the history in *Os Lusiadas* turns out to be a history of Portugal’s long wars (said to he fought in defense), even if most of them were not fought in offence. Therefore, at the beginning of da Gama’s long narration of the history (of long wars) of his nation, he declares that the selection and method of narration would ensure the objectivity of his story:

‘Além disso, o que a tudo enfim me obriga,

É não poder mentir no que disser,

Porque de feitos taís, por mais que diga,
Mais me há-de ficar inda por dizer.
Mas, porque nisto a ordens leve e siga,
Segundo o que desejas de saber,
Primeiro tratarei da larga terra,
Depois direi da sanguinosa guerra.’ (III: 5)

The very first line of the epic ("As armas e os barões assinalados") we now learn, is not merely a Virgilian adornment to the epic, but constitutes the pointer to the major shade of the language of war used in the epic. The kind of poesy and language he prays for, includes singing the shouts of battle trumpets and heroes inspired by Mars (god of war) (I: 5). Many a war occupies the prominent place in Os Lusiadas. Among them stand out three, namely, the Battle of Ourique (1139; narrated in III: 44-53), Battle of the River Salado (1340; narrated in III: 109-116) and the Battle of Aljubarrota (1385; commemorated in IV: 8-45).

The suggestiveness of the spirit and anticipation of war in the line – "Suas forças ajunta, para as guerras" (IV: 7) – is kept up throughout the epic. The inspiring speech of Dom Nuno Álvares Pereira and the excitement it evokes (IV:19-21), the encounters of Vasco da Gama’s fleet with many nations along the African Coast (as for instance, with the black people at Saint Helena Bay: V: 32-36), Fernão Veloso’s ‘historical’ story of “os Doze de Inglaterra” (VI: 42-69), Monsayeed’s description of the Portuguese nation to Catual (VII: 68-72 - reducing them to a nation interested in weapons and
dreadful artillery (VII: 72), Paulo da Gama’s description of the paintings on the Portuguese flags (VIII: 1-42) whereby, “Os olhos tinha prontos e direitos / O Catual na história bem distinta” (VIII: 43) and even Monsayeed’s introduction of the people and polity in Malabar (VII: 30-41) – in all of these resound the immediacy and imminence for war. It is as if the image of an insatiable warrior pervades the entire poem: “Não sofre o peito forte, usado à guerra, / Não ter amigo já a quem faça dano; / E assim não tendo a quem vencer na terra, / Vai cometer as ondas do Oceano” (IV: 48). In such an age of essaying epics in literature and grand narratives in history, interactions among nations became primarily encounters of coercion as is evident not only in the first arrival of the Portuguese but in almost all their successive visits (ref: the singing of the nymph and Tehty’s vision, X: 6-43). Thus the language of Camões’s epic is not just one of an epic of commerce, but one of the description of armoury and battle strategies (some of the relevant examples are I: 67, 68, 88-92 and II: 17).

According to Fernando Castelo-Branco, Camões’s epic focuses not on the people of Portugal but only on a select few, the exceptional ones, or the noble men. What peoples Os Lusiadas are exceptional ones from the pages of Portuguese history, from Afonso Henriques to Vasco da Gama or even beyond. Even the miracles depicted in the work embellish the heroes as exceptional and great. Involvement of people is not mentioned anywhere. Even if a group is mentioned, the concept of ‘people’ is exclusive to Camões’s epic. For instance, from the perspective of the epic, D. Sancho was
removed from power by the pope, only because of the complaints from a few noblemen (III:93). Castelo-Branco says that here is an instance to the effect that Camões was not following the facts given in chronicles – Crónica de D. João I, of Fernão Lopes ("Visão", 127). The only place the poet refers to the involvement of the people, rather impressively, is when the revolution of 1383 is narrated (IV: 22). However, the character of their involvement is negative. Again, here too, Camões seems to refuse to follow his source – crónica de Rui de Pina.

Thomas R. Hart has also opined that the interest of Camões’s epic is not people in their collectivity but only in the deeds of a select few (89). As Castelo-Branco quotes Thomas R. Hart from elsewhere, “‘Camões não se interessa pelo povo português como colectividade. Interessa-se só pelos feitos de alguns portugueses’” (qtd. “Visão”, 128). Camões who considers Afonso Henriques as a principal contributor (if not the creator) for the creation of Portugal, attributes the credit only to two men – Afonso Henriques and Nuno Álvares Pereira – for the independence Portugal enjoyed from the 12th to the 14th centuries. Such an emphasis on the aristocracy or individualism in Camões’s historiography, in fact, originates from Renaissance itself. In Castelo-Branco’s words, “É uma attitude ideológica e uma posição historiográfica na linha do aristocratismo e do individualismo de homem do Renascimento” ("Visão", 129). However, it should be remarked that Camões’s source, Fernão Lopes, emphasises the people in history.
Camões's preference for a warlike, bloodthirsty and individualistic aristocracy has been mentioned by António José Saraiva: "'Por outro lado, a visão de Camões, estreitamente aristocrática, individualista e guerreira (...) (sic) é por completo incompatível com...acontecimentos populares'" (qtd. "Visão", 129). Perhaps, it is also part of his selection (done in history as well as ideology), that he gives a special importance to Lisbon – to its economic and political power and to its contribution in the historical process of making of the nation (the point made in his own article, "A História de Lisboa em ‘Os Lusiadas’", has been highlighted elsewhere in this thesis).

Consequently, 'modernity' and plainness come to characterize Camões's language. According to the recent translator of Camões's epic, the beauty of the epic poet's language consists in "lucidity", being "not prolix" but "plainness" (White, xxi-xxii). The translator further proclaims, "... I have adopted a diction and prosody free to reflect the subtle modernity of Camões's style" (xxi-xxii). Modernity in Camões's verses is reflected even in his use of the rhyme pattern of ottava rima. According to Harold V. Livermore, the Iberian peninsula always went for 'modernity' and 'realism' – even if the writer's choice was epic form. At the time of Camões, it was believed that Italy possessed the speech and style befitting modernity and ottava rima, the modern technique of the division of cantos and stanzas, was itself an essential part of Italian modernity. As far as realism is concerned, the choice for Camões was fixed on a historical subject. This is how, Camões came to depend on 'modern' historians rather than medieval chroniclers who
were supposedly, as Camões himself hints at in his epic, fantastic and fanciful. In Livermore’s words, “A história baseia-se nos escritos dos hitoriadores autênticos e modernos. Sem dúvida, Camões perferia os hitoriadores modernos aos cronistas medievais, que não prestavam para a sua intenção pética” (83).

A major convention in classical epic is that it begins in *medias res*, that is, in the middle. Immediately after the invocation, the reader finds the Portuguese explorers already *midway* in the ocean: “Já no largo Oceano navegavam” (I: 19). By now, an assembly of gods is being convened in order to deliberate on the consequences of the Portuguese expedition, an issue being debated for and against by Venus and Bacchus respectively. But the Portuguese were already there in the seas, where the south meets the Orient (I: 42). A very important point to remember on this occasion is that Camões, beginning his epic in *medias res* was not merely following a poetic convention but was also exploiting a constraint imposed on him historically. Speaking of this historical necessity, Landeg White writes:

We meet the navigators off the East African coast in the Mozambique Channel. Camões picks up his story in *medias res* not simply in imitation of Virgil but because Vasco da Gama had by now passed the Great Fish River where Bartolomeu Dias was forced to turn back in 1488 and was genuinely in unchartered waters. (230)
The use of gods in Camões was demanded also because of epic requirements, primarily. For, epic poetry demands a sense of transcendence and eternity. But da Gama was delimited by history. Consequently, use of gods became indispensable – in the words of Harold V. Livermore, "um recurso poético indispensável" (84). Livermore is trying to encounter Voltaire's criticism against Camões's epic that it mixed paganism and Christianity, though, Livermore himself concedes that Voltaire was just reflecting the stand of the Council of Trent (84).

It is the nature of history to insist on linear narration along a chronological and clock-time. The reason is that history deals with a cause-effect pattern of the particular events in the past. Literature, though it too seeks cause and effect in human experience, attempts to present lessons of that experience and in the process becomes comparatively universal and transcendent of structures of linear time. A historian is expected to begin from the beginning of the subject he has chosen and should move towards the ending, along a clock time. A poet, dealing with the same subject can begin from the middle or even from the end, and can end his narration in a circular fashion. The point is succinctly put by Russel B. Nye, in his "History and Literature: Branches of the Same Tree":

The problem of history is its temporality; the facts with which it deals are constantly being annihilated. The situation, as Jean Paul Sartre once remarked, is something like sitting in a speeding automobile,
facing backward, so that the present instant is always just past. The literary artist, of course, has this problem too, but he can solve it by certain kinds of creative reconstruction denied the historian. [Quoting the example of Marcel Proust, Nye continues...] His aim was to recreate a culture and a society so completely through *memory so that they would remain forever untouched by temporality...* (146-147, emphasis added).

This is exactly that takes place with Camões’s epic that begins in *medias res*, in which history is constructed along the principle of time-flux of memory and ends *circularly* (from Alexander of X: 156 to the Alexander of I: 3). Camões’s poetry looks back and forth into the history of Portugal becoming and growing into a nation. Many of its stories are foregrounded through *repetitions* (as, for instance, Paulo da Gama repeats in canto VIII many of the events described already by his brother in Canto III). The post-Gama period is told in future tense as in a prophecy by the nymph and her head Tethys though, technically all those events were a matter of the past by the time of Camões’s writing and therefore, had become true history.

Such repetitions, like the ‘*digressions*’ in the epic do not in any way mar the unity or structure of the epic. Norwood H. Andrews, Jr. who thinks that “the digressions...are fundamental characteristic of the ancient epic” considers “amusement” as the chief purpose of digressions; he also feels that digressions were necessary for the sake of “retardation of action”, since action
at a historical range requires time (84-85). One such a digression is da Gama’s long speech to the Sheikh of Melinde. But, as Andrews, Jr. remarks, such cataloging (found in many a place in the epic, including one depicted in the fleet’s banners) “affords Camões the opportunity to show how the voyage itself is the culmination of the long series of heroic events which are described” (89). The hero of the epic/history of Portugal was not just one person, but the Portuguese as a whole.

In other words, interruptions or digressions are part of the structure of Os Lusiadas which is understood in terms of, as Myron Malkiel Jirmounsky has pointed out, “a narrativa contínua” (3) which has but a seemingly simple plot – the voyage of Vasco da Gama and his companions from South Africa to Mombassa, to Melinde, till Calicut and their return to Portugal after visiting an enchanting island. According to Jirmounsky, this plot is ‘interrupted’ at least in five ways: i) the epic has not just one person as hero, but the entire nation ii) the events are in strict adherence to the records of “João de Barros, Diogo do Couto, Correia, Castanheda, Osório”, though transformed into poetic form (iii) while in Virgil, we find the ideal character/type, in Ariosto, it is plastic art as in sculpture, in Tasso, nuances of psychology, we encounter in Camões nothing of these, but it is an epic-historical narrative or “narrativa épica histórica” (4)

Maria Leonor Carvalhão Buescu, discusses the structure of Os Lusiadas by presenting the nature of the four invocations in Camões’s epic
which according to her, is “um poema organicamente multi-estrutural” (368). The first invocation is addressed to the nymphs of Tagus (I: 4,5) while the second one is addressed to Calíope (III: 1). However, in the third invocation addressed to both the nymphs of Tagus and Mondego (VII: 78), Camões leaves the lyrical mode and adopts the pastoral. Buescu notes that the first two invocations are followed by epic propositions or proposal in tune with the epic tradition, but the third invocation is followed by a proposition which is highly complex. For, as a canonical subversion in relation to the traditional rules of epic, it contains a counterpoint, an antiproposition, in the sense that it is a proposal as to what he will not write or what he is not going to write (VII: 84,85,86), though they are followed by the canonical epic proposition in Canto VII: 87. Finally, in the proposition that comes along with the fourth invocation (X: 89), the voice returns to the Muse. This does not mean that the poet’s voice stops. His personal voice (personal complaints that he is not rewarded, etc.) continue to function as an alternative voice, effecting an equilibrium for diverse discourses in the poem. Consequently, a dialectics is created between the voice of the Muse (be it Calíope, Tágides or the nymphs of Mondego) and the voice of the poet; between the existential discourse and the historical discourses; between the human, universal sense and that of the collective, historical sense marked by finitude. In the words of Buescu, “Dialéctica entre a voz da Musa, seja de Calíope, das Tágides ou das Ninfas do Mondego, e a voz do poeta; nesta, entre o discurso existencial e o discurso
historico; entre o humano, no sentido universalizante, e o colectivo, historicamente marcado por uma finitude” (372).

The technique of the poet in effecting such a structure into the poem consists in bringing a counter voice to the invocation / proposition to the Muse, with respect to the voice which may be either historical or fictional. For this, the poet reserves the final part of each Canto in order to pronounce his moral / generalization which is, in effect, a critique or antidote to the preceding section or proposition. Generally, according to Buescu, the final effect is that of a metamorphosis similar to the one in Homer or Kafka in whom the dialectical structure working through thesis and antithesis ends in a “metamorphose” (373). Thus, from the perspective of the structural unity of the poem, the Ilha dos Amores (IX: 88-91) becomes the climax of the poem, as the various metamorphoses in the poem culminate in “imortalidade” and “divinizacao”, taking roots in the eschatological doctrines – “raiz nas doutrinas escatológicas” (376 -377).

Jacinto do Prado Coelho who also sees dialectics at the heart of Camões’ epic, assumes that the ‘contradictions’ in the poem do not necessarily come from the poet’s personal life but from the age which was undergoing tremendous radical changes. At such a juncture of history, the Renaissance epic meant a story of man/men dominating the forces of nature by heroism and intelligence, becoming glaringly equal to gods of the passing age, viz., the medieval. Consequently, “Camões não cessa de se apresentar
como um tema polémico ... a sua obra é uma soma polifónica” and *Os Lusiadas* turned out to be a complex, polemical, polyphonic poem, full of dialectical ‘contradictions’ with the presence of many ‘opponents’ in the poem, like “o Velho do Restelo” and “a Ilha dos Amores” (42). *Os Lusiadas* is, thus, a very engaging / critical poem assuming the universal because of its dialectical discourses inscribed in it. In the words of Jacinto do Prado Coelho, “*Os Lusiadas*, poema simultaneamente épico e crítico, veiculam pois uma mensagem universal de humanismo generoso que contrabalança e ultrapassa a intolerância religiosa e um patriotismo estreito” (43).

As a historian does, a poet may investigate the past in order to interpret it for a proper and relevant understanding of the present. But a poet, going a step further, as Camões does, could make the process of reading the past a regular practice of the Portuguese. This could be achieved only by transforming *history* into a matter of *future* too. In fact, the major effect of an imaginative transformation of history into the cast of literature is the immediate assumption of history into a vision a future. João Camilo dos Santos observes Auerbach’s stance in the matter:

Auerbach says clearly, though indirectly, what seems evident: the Portuguese literary works of the epoch to which we refer [the epoch of *Os Lusiadas*] stage characters face to face with a difficult reality, in complex and problematic situations, though *full of future promise*.  

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These characters may fail or succeed in their confrontation with that reality, but nothing happens without consequences. (136)

A strong nationhood is possible, Camões seems to think, only by a ‘history commemorated for ever.’ History and memory thus conjoins to become fame in Camoesʼs epic. This fame which is possible only through an imaginative re-working and re-formation of history is, in fact, the central motive not only of the epic but also of the history (Portuguese achievements) scripted in Os Lusiadas.

Vasco da Gama himself is enticed by King Manuel I for the task of venturing a voyage to the unknown seas by the words of “glory” and “fame”(IV: 78,79). Others joined him, “All driven by a thirst for glory” (IV: 82). Till the reign of João II, Portuguese adventures meant, primarily, battles in and outside Iberian Peninsula. From his time onwards, “The very quest to which I [da Gama] myself was born” (IV: 60), a new interest to study and explore ‘unknown’ lands begins: however, the motivation the poet attributes is the “pursuit of eternal fame” (IV: 60). The single motivation of the Portuguese heroes in Veloso’s story of the Twelve of England is “honour and glory” (VI: 66).

Bacchus who represents the opposite of fame, stands for the problem of evil which is only at the best a theological issue as far as history is concerned. But in poetry, the problem of evil / fame becomes a matter of suspense, for the reader waits for a (happy) denouement which is, linked to
Providence, could be the unexpected intervention of God. Therefore, as Thomas R. Hart observes, the Isle of Love / Fame “is rather a result of their achievement than the primary motive for it” (95). In other words, Camões cannot do full justice to chronicles and historical documents and his creative motive is to end the narrative, since the ideology or vision is convincingly stated in the ‘middle’, already. As a result,

He devotes a single stanza (X, 144) to Gama’s return voyage, saying nothing about the delay caused by the sickness and death of Gama’s brother Paulo which Barros covers in some detail, pointing out how much Gama was affected by it. Why does Camões fail to mention it? Obviously, because he wanted to give his poem a happy ending. (96-97)

It can safely be assumed that what Os Lusiadas presents is not just history, nor just poetry, but a vision of history.

The idea of poetic immortality reaches even eschatological heights in Vasco da Gama’s prayer: “De quem se ganha a vida com perdê-la. / Doce fazendo a morte as honras dela!” (VI: 83). William C. Atkinson’s translation is significant:

‘Happy they who met their end at the point of an African lance while fighting valiantly for the faith on Mauritanian shores, who left great deeds and shining memories behind them, winning life in the losing of
it and by the manner of their dying robbing death of its sting!’ (156-157, emphasis added)

Canto VI ends on spotting the shore of Calicut. Now, the rest of the Canto is a lesson by the poet on how to attain honour, fame or immortality (VI: 95-99). The reason of such an insistence on fame, of course, is that Camões re-visits the history of his nation through a faith that sees the reward not only in this world but even in the world to come. One beauty of Camões’s epic, as Paul Merchant indicates, is that it does not remain to be merely a ‘nationalistic’ or ‘propagandist’ epic (22) but, on the other hand, the category of the national merges into the religious and the mythical vision of Camões. As Merchant goes on to remark:

… the title, Os Lusiadas. The Sons of Lusus, even surpasses that of the Aeneid, which refers only to a single man; Lusus is a mythical eponymous hero of Lusitania. The hero of the poem is Vasco da Gama, the great discoverer, and the work becomes a poetic history of Portugal culminating in Gama’s passage to India. (49, emphasis added)

For the ability Camões exhibits in envisioning a time beyond the clock-time of the mundane or sin, António José Saraiva thinks that the sources must be Plato and Saint Augustine. Saraiva, referring to the world of his lyrics, raises the question how the poet belonging to the world of sin/Babel could write on Sião (Sion, referring to celestial time). Saraiva proposes the assumption that Camões was influenced by Platonic idea through Saint
Augustine's *Confessions*, that we have 'reminiscência' from the Time (Sion) before birth, Time before the original sin (55). Hereafter, Camões imagines this Sion not for the past but for the future. Still the question persists: how can the 'memória carnal' aspire for 'futuro celeste'? Here also, Saraiva thinks, Saint Augustine comes to his recourse through the idea of Grace that can change human will and nature. Thus, the poem that is more Augustinian than Platonic, becomes an imploration for Grace and eschatological hope. Norwood H. Andrews, Jr. thinks that the form of epic itself signifies such an eschatological dimension. In his words,

> Although the composition of Camões pantheon has now largely been described, there remains the necessity of examining how certain aspects of it bear specifically upon his concept of the epic as a whole. His pragmatic view of epic purpose has already been treated, but it cannot be doubted that he thought of his work as an end in itself as well. It was to him nothing less than the immortalization of its content, the actual achievement of an *afterlife in terms of fame*. Such an attitude is not surprising when it is remembered how widespread during the sixteenth century was the idea that verses made their subject *live on long after the flesh itself was gone*. (77, emphasis added)

Thus, the idea of immortality and reward awaiting beyond the mundane for honourable deeds, became integral to the conception of history inscribed in *Os Lusiadas*. Even when some of the mythical heroes were
merely ‘mortal’, they were reborn in the artistic creation of the epic writer as immortal. Camões learned this lesson, according to Andrews Jr., from Homer and Virgil who had achieved the same magic in their epics. Camões could also escape the censorship, since as a Christian, he could not regard the mythical heroes having existence beyond the mundane; nor could he, as a Christian, directly make the real human beings (among them, da Gama, his kinsman) as immortal; but he could very well confine them safely within the artistic limits of epic writing.

Thus the temporality in Os Lusiadas combines the historical and poetic, the mundane and the other-worldly. The Isle of Love of Cantos IX and X, the denouement of the epic, itself connotes these two dimensions of Camões’s vision which combines “the physical and the intellectual, the sensual and philosophical, the imaginative and the moral, the ‘Roman’ and the Christian visions of the world” (252). It is significant that the Isle of Love is created by Venus and Cupid with the help of the giant goddess Fame (IX: 44). For the expedition of the nation reads almost like a spiritual struggle that passionately seeks fame, eternity or immortality through “virtude justa e dura” (VI: 98). Thus Camões’s epic attempts a transcendence beyond the mere secular and the material realms of a national history. He clearly states the purpose of his poetry: “...eu cantando andava / Tal prémio de meus versos me tornassem: / A troco dos descansos que esperava, / Das capelas de louro que me honrassem” (VII: 81).
The opposite of fame, of course, is shame (IV: 95-97; VI: 33, 34, 44, 45 etc.) and avarice and materialism (VIII: 94, 98, 99). Camões, therefore, declares the nature of heroes who would people his epic: “Aqueles sós direi, que aventuraram / Por seu Deus, por seu Rei, a amada vida, / Onde, perdendo-a, em fama a dilataram, / Tão bem de suas obras merecida” (VII: 87). Not that he has selected only those Lusitanians who would fit his vision of history, but instead, he has attempted a re-telling of the ‘entire’ history of Portuguese achievements in the new light.

In this context, Landeg White’s remarkable observation is worth-quoting:

Above all else, however, The Lusiads is an epic. History supplies its heroes (the Portuguese) and its subject matter (da Gama’s voyage to India 1497-8). The poet’s experience of the same voyage over half-a-century later supplies a thousand intimate touches. But Camões’s main concern is to dramatize the significance of that original voyage as an event transcending history, redefining the course of human affairs in the divine plan. (xiii, emphasis added)

According to Fernando Castelo-Branco, Camões’s interpretation of history includes the idea of Providence. History takes place not because of any intrinsic forces at work within the process of history, but because of divine intervention, deus ex machina. To quote Castelo-Branco, “Camões apresenta ainda uma interpretação da história que tem algo de providencialismo.
porquanto a forma como os sucessos ocorrem é por vezes não fruto nem resultado das forças intrínsecas em jogo, mas da intervenção divina” (“A Visão”, 120). And Camões himself sings, “Ocultos os juízos de Deus são; / As gentes vãs, que não nos entenderam, / Chamam-lhe fado mau, fortuna escura, / Sendo só providência de Deus pura” (X: 38, emphasis added).

It appears that the very sublime nature of the voyage (as a Renaissance feat, the achievement had far-reaching consequences in various disciplines) demanded an epic treatment of history. As Norwood H. Andrews, Jr. remarks, since the voyage itself had epic dimensions, even the historians, while writing on its history, imagined the event at epic ranges. In his words, for instance, “João de Barros Décadas afford many examples of such a collective frame of mind; one of the best is his comparison of da Gama’s voyage to those of the Greeks” (65). In other words, the very nature of reality required an epic treatment. For the same reason, Camões transcends the Virgilian structure of the epic he had purportedly imitated. For, what Camões presents is the vision of a history to be looked at from eternity or immortality “...because [as Andrews, Jr. puts it] the ultimate truth he is seeking is the reality of a life after death in terms of the fame which undeniably heroic achievement deserves” (92, emphasis added). In the words of Landeg White, “...Camões is not bound by his Virgil, whose language and devices are constantly being subverted and transcended” (xiv). In other words, what we find in Camões is not a deification of the Portuguese, but an allegorization of history into an artistic fictionality, itself a transcendence amounting to a sense of eternity.

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What he seeks is not ‘actual’ history but a historiography which could better be understood in terms of Christian philosophy of history. Norwood H. Andrews, Jr.’s words attest to this metaphysical aspect of Camões’s epic:

Within the framework of the pantheon of Os Lusiadas, it is the culmination of Bacchus’ fears and Venus’ hopes. Within the framework of the highly sensual imagery, which may have come directly from the Song of Songs, it the mystic union of the mariners with the afterlife which Thetis and her nymphs represent. In short, Camões has employed a technique of Christian mysticism in order to marry his heroes to classical brides of fame who are in many ways artistically similar to San Juan de la Cruz’s Bridegroom. (83, emphasis added)

It is, therefore, unjust to brand Os Lusiadas merely as a national epic, though it is true that the task the poet has undertaken is for “à Nação minha!” (X: 9). It is also part of his task to re-view the history of his nation in the light of faith. Commerce was, obviously, a major incentive for the expedition. But Camões writes its history by immortalizing the story through poetry and faith. History, he wants, to become a memory. In fact, faith is the major issue in almost all encounters whether they are, between / among the Occidental / Oriental nations. It was not merely wars of commerce but of faiths, as the nymph sings (X: 14) one encounters in Os Lusiadas. What we see in Camões’s version of history in such a blending of nationalism and religion:
a history of those who found their reason to die in “ao Rei e à Lei” (X: 23). Hence his advice to his king Sebastião, to protect those who would conquer the travails of living and persevering (X: 151). It is, of course, the uniqueness of Camões’s creativity that he successfully combined the nationalistic and the religious in his epic. According to Harold V. Livermore, the beauty of Os Lusiadas consists in that it has not attempted the ‘heights’ of poesia divina where human criticism or critical engagement is impossible to apply; it is neither humana poesia where no transcendence is required (81-82). The place of Camões’s epic is between these two kinds so that there is a continuous shifting of centres in the textual engagement, since the work deals with a history of human endeavour while the form requires a reaching out towards the poesia divina, at the same time.

In short, Camões’s work is a national epic, commercial epic and even religious epic – all become one and richly complex and multi-layered. As Landeg White rightly remarks: “Da Gama’s voyage of exploration becomes an extended metaphor for his [Camões’s] own explorations in the ‘craft’ of poetry” (xviii) – and to add to these words a line from Camões’s work – “by routes never charted” (I: 27).

There are many Camonians who identify the beauty of Os Lusiadas in its lyrical quality. The English enthusiast of Camões, Aubrey F.G. Bell (1881-1950) who spent about thirty years in Lisbon, has contributed much to the universal acceptance of the Portuguese epic poet. Aubrey Bell’s early
writings about Camões appeared in *Studies in Portuguese Literature* (Oxford, 1913), and *Portuguese Literature* (Oxford, 1922). In the opinion of Aubrey Bell, the greatness of Camões consists in his being a lyric poet more than in his being an epic poet. In other words, Aubrey Bell considers *Os Lusiadas* a great lyric poem rather than an epic poem. Bell regards Camões's epic even superior to *Iliada* and *Odisseia*: Bell's excitement is a tribute, according to A. Álvaro Dória, to the wonder of the transparent fluency of the verse and the vigour in which music is accompanied, and for the rare achievement of the poet who has personified and projected Portugal in the poem as the ideal state (42). Aubrey Bell wrote an excellent biography of the poet entitled, *Luis de Camões* (1936) in which *Os Lusiadas* is praised for its lyric flights, grace, melancholy, love of the nature, power of expression, courage, patriotism and the personification of the nation of Portugal:

‘sua graça e melancholia, no seu amor da natureza, na sua apaixonada devoção, na sua persistência e resistência, na sua independência e sensitive orgulho, no seu dom de lirismo e poder de expressão, na sua coragem e ardente patriotismo, (...) [sic] é a personificação e o modelo ideal da Nação Portuguesa’ (qtd. in Dória, 42).

It may be remarked that, as Harold V. Livermore has stated, the tradition of **epic creation has disappeared** with the triumph of Christianity (82). Human heroism for worldly gain was no more considered heroic. However, Islamic expansion necessitated the return of heroic poetry of the
defenders of faith in the Christian world. Thus we have Camões and others; in
the words of Livermore, "Eis o tema que reúne a Canção de Rolando, O
Poema do Cid, A Grã Conquista do Ultramar e Camões e Tasso" (82).
Strictly speaking, Camões's epic is not without criticism against the generic
expectations. As Dino F. Preti reminds us, the genre of epic is primarily
*narrative*. But Camões preferred to make his work more *descriptive* than
*narrative*, with such techniques as selection from history, adjectives, poetic
adornment, *deus ex machina*, etc. The purpose was to create a poetic reality,
though he heavily depended on chronicles. The question left to answer is how
one can regard the work still an epic. Dino F. Preti says that one needs to have
no difficulty to regard Camões's work still as an epic, if one is prepared to
accept Hegel's words that justify details / descriptions as a necessary
component for maintaining a sense of continuity in narration thereby, the
work to function as an organism in the reader's mind. To quote Hegel's
words,

'A prolixidade e a independência relativas dos promenores que
caracterizam muitos poemas épicos e parecem diminuir assim a sua
coesão, não devem ser considerados como um defeito, sob pretexto de
que um poema épico deve poder *cantar-se de forma rigorosamente
continua* : como toda a obra de arte, deve formar um todo *orgânico* que
desfila numa calma objetiva, a fim de poder interessar por cada um dos
seus aspectos, por cada um dos quadros da realidade vivente de que se
compõe.' (qtd. Preti, 194, emphasis added)
The poet, thus, is expected to create 'epic contemporary reality', believable for the contemporary readers. In other words, he should create not bare history, but poetic fiction, in the realm of art. For this, he should be loyal to poetic mimesis; he should even abandon 'the real' for the sake of verisimilitude. The (so-called) historical reality is transfigured in Camões's work, as Preti notes, by the poetic necessities of abstraction, combination, amplification, transformation, insertion of the marvelous, *deus ex machina*, etc (194). However, he did not have to resort to mythical vision of the discovery itself (as the medieval writers had as an essential ingredient of epic), for he was already in the epoch of discoveries (197).

One of the most well-known Camonians, José de Macedo (whose pseudonym is António de Melo da Fonseca), too, justifies Camões's work in terms of the genre of epic. During the 17th century, there was active polemics on who, between Camões and Torquato Tasso (author of *Jerusalem Libertada*), was greater. Macedo who praises Tasso for his great prosaic quality, finds Camões's work a perfect example for poetry. The major poetic qualities Macedo finds in Camões are, graphological difference, linguistic freedom, use of rhetorical figures and tropes, aesthetic delights, descriptions of nature and verisimilitude. Function of mythology in the work, therefore, is precisely to impart aesthetic delight to the readers. According to Macedo, verisimilitude in poetry does not necessarily denote historical veracity or truth of facts, but structure which in poetry signifies alteration in the linearity of historical chronology. In other words, time of history is re-organized into the
time of epic / poetic discourse. Here lies the difference between historical narration and epic poetry. Macedo’s ideas may be enumerated in the words of Lucília Gonçalves Pires:

Tratando-se dum gênero narrativo, a epopeia tem de sujeitar-se à exigência de verosimilhança da ‘fábula’, particularização da norma geral da ‘naturalidade’ da poesia. A verosimilhança da ‘fábula’ não significa no entanto rigorosa sujeição à verdade histórica. A verdade dos factos não é critério pertinente na produção épica – primeira divergência entre o poema épico e a narração historiográfica. Mas outra diferença mais importante se refere: uma diferença de estrutura. O poema épico implica uma alteração da linearidade cronológica da história. Mesmo com objecto idêntico, a estrutura da narração é necessariamente diferente, sendo a fragmentação e a subversão do tempo da história ao organizar-se im tempo do discurso épico que constituem essa diferença. (23. emphasis original)

By analyzing the essential nature of the literary source, namely its structure, one finds that though Os Lusiadas is primarily an epic in its generic form, the epic requirements in the work are simultaneously complemented by historical material. Consequently, the work assumes the nature of history also, though the linear and monolithic time structure of a historical narrative is continuously upset by the temporal flux inherent in the epic form of Os Lusiadas. In other words, the reading pleasure of Camões’s epic consists in its
continuous shift between the structure of an epic and that of a history, allowing freedom for the reader to take up perspectives, rather than a single perspective, of the historical subject.