

*Sepúlveda e Lianor: Canto Primeiro.* Jerónimo Corte-Real.

Ed. Hélio J. S. Alves. Coimbra: Centro Interuniversitário de Estudos Camonianos, 2014. 202 pp. N.p.

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This is not a usual book. The poem starts in Goa, with a true love story between Indo-Portuguese characters, complete with lyric exchanges, love intrigues (including murder of a rival), a happy marriage in a climate of colonial prosperity, and an attempt to return home that is never accomplished. Instead, a shipwreck off the South African coast provides the unfortunate couple and hundreds of survivors with a chance for more adventures: living on for six months among friendly and hostile natives, fending off wild animals, coping to their deaths with hunger and thirst. Their pitiful, strictly historical misadventures were soon the subject of a 1554 narrative pamphlet for Portuguese mournful consumption. By the time Jerónimo Corte-Real prepared to write a poem about it, some thirty years later, it was still a story that haunted many families, having become a part of the Portuguese collective imaginary about their ongoing role in the epic/tragic history of European colonial expansion, yet sufficiently distant as to become the stuff of multiple developments, quite different from the purpose of the original narrative, including the moral linking of murder and punishment.

Corte-Real, with matching inspiration and craftsmanship, had carefully researched oral and written sources and recast the story with tools provided by classical rhetoric and poetics. The result is an astonishing poem finished sometime after 1585, published in 1594, and automatically placed by literary history in the second row of the epic hall of fame, simply because by then Camões occupied all the seats in the front row. Hélio Alves, one of the best connoisseurs of early modern Portuguese poetry, has worked for two decades on the epic corpus and has succeeded in bringing some great poetry to the spotlight. *Sepúlveda* captivated him and inspired the plethora of wholehearted adjectives that crowd parts of his hefty 112-page introduction. There is more to it, fortunately. His fervor, which he transmits to his readers, made him also research the poem and prepare a critical edition like we have not seen in a long time.

The introduction first explores the dates and circumstances of the creative process, right after the 1580 dynastic crisis, when Corte-Real and his patron, Phillip II of Spain, maintained an unclear relationship. Section 2, dedicated to showing why each canto is “sublime” (37), is probably the most questionable part in the whole book. Enthusiasm prevails over scholarly rigor, which is not in itself a problem (it is convincing and contagious), but some *RQ* readers will miss a more distant, objective approach. The same

applies to other sections, where Alves shows familiarity with all previous commentators without engaging in critical dialogue with them. Section 3 is most interesting: it reviews the poem's fortune over the centuries. We learn that, in contrast to twentieth-century disregard, the poem was read and imitated by leading Spanish authors like Lope, Cervantes, Calderón, and Tirso. Section 4 is an extensive study of literary aspects, where serious application of Spanish stylistic critical tradition meets Alves's adroit knowledge of classical poetics and an updated rhetorical approach, with particular attention paid to the crucial value of *sprezzatura* (82–89). The sixty-one-word title, traditionally abridged as *Naufração de Sepúlveda*, has changed: Alves argues that the shipwreck in the original pamphlet is not the central subject for Corte-Real, who represents it as punishment for the murder caused by love. One would argue that this does not displace it as the main event in the poem. In any case, titles consecrated by long traditions tend to prevail over new ones.

In a short prologue, Alves writes some of his strongest pages denouncing what he rightly calls a grotesque situation in Portuguese philology: the near-total absence of editions with “lexical, stylistic, rhetorical commentary, of sources, of parallel *loci*, topics and subjects” (9). Since Corte-Real is twice the victim of neglect (editorial and critical), Alves does not hide his intention to “create a critical and historiographical tradition” (8) on his work. He proceeds to do so by treating this “poet in the grand manner” (8), the way Dante or Garcilaso or Camões were treated in centuries past, at the beginning of their critical reception: with an annotated edition that puts to work all the knowledge mentioned before, in a “line by line, word by word” (9) commentary. The task is daunting: it demands skillful research in multiple directions and wisdom to exhibit only relevant knowledge, matching inspiration and craftsmanship. The result shows that Alves was the right person to do so. He could only fit the introduction and one canto in this volume. We eagerly expect he releases the other sixteen cantos of the poem formerly known as *Naufração de Sepúlveda*.

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