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Sixteenth-century Portuguese Voyage and Shipwreck Narratives: Refusals of Female Hyper-vulnerability in the Contact Zone*

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Resumo

Para um artigo no contexto de objetivos estabelecidos, examino comparativamente as narrativas portuguesas de sobreviventes de naufrágios no século XVI, analisando como a figura da mulher era colocada no domínio simbólico (ou na negação deste domínio). O ocorrido com Leonor, na seqüência da narração, ela retorna aos braços do marido e ele exige que ela seja enterrada até o pescoço (na areia) ou torná-la invisível, a resposta mais comum para sua história. Espero conseguir alguma emblemática figura sobrevivente feminina na literatura portuguesa sobre naufrágios no Brasil, ainda quando não me concentrei nos relatos de Cabral e outros. A afirmação de que Boxer e Freire (o primeiro se distanciou desta opinião no curso de 1961 na Witswatersrand University se atribui esta opinião a Freire e Nash) de que a dominação de Portugal e Espanha pelos mouros preparou aos portugueses ao casamento durante a época da exploração e a dominação pelos mouros e acostumou aos viajantes ibéricos em geral a achar as mulheres mouras sexualmente atraentes. Na África do Sul discuto que esta espécie de pensamento é importante fonte do apartheid ainda quando as linhagens

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de sangue não garantem um lugar dominante na atualidade. No caso do Brasil espero encontrar emblemas originários e diferentes tratamentos sobre as mulheres européias abandonadas ou náufragas, tal como aparecem nas histórias refeitas na literatura popular.

Palavras-chaves: Portugueses, Viagem, Zona de contato

Resumen

Para un artículo en el contexto de objetivos establecidos, examino comparativamente las narrativas portuguesas de sobrevivientes de naufragios en el siglo XVI analizando cómo la figura de la mujer era colocada en el dominio simbólico (o en la negación de este dominio). Lo ocurrido con Leonor, en la secuencia de la narración, ella retorna a los brazos del marido y él exige que ella sea enterrada hasta el cuello (en la arena) o volverla invisible, la respuesta más común para su historia. Espero conseguir alguna emblemática figura sobreviviente femenina en la literatura portuguesa sobre naufragios en Brasil, aún cuando no me he sumergido en los relatos de Cabral y otros. La afirmación de que Boxer y Freyre (el primero se distanció de esta opinión en el curso de 1961 en la Witswatersrand University, se atribuye esta opinión a Freyre y Nash) de que la dominación de Portugal y España por los moros preparó a los portugueses al casamiento durante la época de la exploración y la dominación por los moros y acostumbró a los viajantes ibéricos en general a hallar a las mujeres moriscas sexualmente atraentes. En África del sur argumento que esta especie de pensamiento es importante fuente del apartheid aún cuando las linajes de sangre no garantizan un lugar dominante en la actualidad. En el caso de Brasil espero encontrar emblemas originarios y diferentes tratamientos sobre las mujeres europeas abandonadas o náufragas, tal como aparecen en las historias re-hechas en la literatura popular.

Palabras claves: Portugueses, Viaje, Zonas de contacto

Abstract

For a paper in the context of your stated goals would love to examine comparatively the (Southern African) portuguese shipwreck survivor narratives of this early period with the several Portuguese shipwrecks in Brazil at the same time, looking specifically at the way the figure of the shipwrecked woman was positioned in symbolic dominion (or in denial of

dominion). What has happened with Leonor is that in subsequent retelling (from Camões onward) she has been returned to her husband's embrace, thrust deeper into the soil (Mickles translation of the *Lusiads* — he claims she buried herself to the neck in sand), or rendered invisible — the more common response to her story. I am hoping to find some emblematic female survivor figure in the Portuguese shipwreck literature concerning Brazil — though I haven't pored over the Cabral accounts and others. The affirmation about Boxer and Freyre's assertion that it was the domination of Portugal and Spain by the Moors that prepared the Portuguese for their propensity to intermarry during the exploration era — that the domination by Moors had accustomed the Iberian travellers in general to find the Moorish woman sexually attractive (Boxer's idea — though he distances himself from it in his Witwatersrand University lecture in 1961, and attributes it to Freyre and Nash). In South Africa I argue that this sort of thinking was an important stream in apartheid thought, even though Portuguese culture and bloodlines did not secure a dominant place in modern-day South Africa. In the case of Brazil, I am expecting to find perhaps different originary emblems, and different treatment of those emblems — of the abandoned or cast ashore European women — as the story or stories get remade into *popular literature*.

Keywords: Portuguese, Voyage, Contact Zone

Introduction

In this essay I will trace a very slender thread, a thread that might be thought of as an originary connection between the East Indies, Brazil, the Caribbean and southern Africa. This thread — the corpus of texts known as the Portuguese shipwreck survivor narratives — forms one of the earliest examples of a coherent discursive project for these four areas, and as such it might be seen as a productive place from which to examine the more complex cultural entanglements of the late modern era, lodged as they are in the contemporary discourses of hybridity.

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The individual accounts of voyages and shipwreck collected in the *Historia Trágico-marítima* (HTM) (1773-1775) by Bernardo Gomes de Brito were initially part of a quite diffuse body of literature called *relações* which were published and distributed as individual pamphlets or folios in the sixteenth century. By the seventeenth century, these *relações* were more typically hung from a string near shop doors in Lisbon, Coimbra and elsewhere, and thus came to be known as *literatura de cordel* or string literature. The *relações*, and the later literature known as *literatura de cordel*, publicized news of sensational local events, Portuguese maritime triumphs, horrors of every sort, and tales of the Indies, as well as popular poems and songs.

One strand, then, of the many thousands of documents first published and distributed as *literatura de cordel* was selected by Gomes de Brito and gathered under the title *História trágico-marítima*, and this act of editorial foresight marked the beginning of a separate, or separated-out, discourse of Portuguese early modern maritime lore. Furthermore, Gomes de Brito utilized an organizing axis for the collection that united the Indies, the Caribbean, Brazil and southern Africa contact zone texts, to use Mary Louise Pratt's apt term, and further distinguished these stories of Iberian triumph-in-adversity as tragic.

For this essay, I am isolating a still smaller thread within the shipwreck corpus. This thread concerns the evident anxiety about the place of women in the contact zone, both Iberian and Amerindian. I trace this thread through two shipwreck accounts, the *São João* (1554) and the *São Francisco* (1596), Canto V of Luís de Camões *Os Lusíadas* (1573), illustrations of a key episode from accounts of the wreck of the *São João*, and a contemporary painting from South Africa by Cyril Coetzee (1999) that reconstructs, re-imagines or invents an iconic version

of the original encounter of the Portuguese seamen with the sixteenth-century indigene in southern África.

I will show that women have been read as doubled, and in many ways contradictory, ciphers in the Portuguese shipwreck literature. In some cases, the exposure of their reproductive or generative identity generated fear, as if their very wombs, were a dangerous gateway to a rival line (and, as such, an eventual political threat to the global dominion to which Portugal aspired). In another way, the figures of women represented in the literature are entangled in the chronicler's compulsion to stage, or attempt to enforce, a rhetoric of female hyper-vulnerability.

But women also intrude in these proto-imperial texts as rival historian, and they command that the archives face them¹. This, too, provokes anxiety. While the construction of hyper-vulnerability was deemed necessary in order to maintain patriarchal hegemony, it was also horrifying to consider for most of the chroniclers of this era when that same hyper-vulnerability was transferred to the newly discovered lands.

First, will examine an episode from the story of the most famous Portuguese couple to be shipwrecked in southern Africa during the *carreira da Índia*, Leonor de Sá and her husband, Manuel de Sousa Sepúlveda. Their emblematic death scene was first described in the widely circulated *relação, História da Muy Notavel perda do Galeão grande São Joam...* (1554)², later popularized in Canto V of Luís de Camões *Os Lusíadas* (1573), and was a central motif in Jerónimo Corte-Real's *Naufragio e lastimoso sucesso da perdição de Manoel de Sousa de Sepúlveda & dona Lieanor de Sá sua molher & Filhos* (1594). Finally, the story of the shipwreck of the *São João* (including the scene in which Leonor and Manuel met their tragic end) was published in the *História trágico-marítima*³ and this collection itself was reprinted, often with

illustrations, throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Both Camões and the illustrators of later editions of the HTM evidently utilized the death scene of Leonor and Manuel in order to draw attention to one great risk in the exploration age: the loss of control over the Portuguese (noble) women and a likelihood that the husbands, seamen, and crew would be, in certain circumstances, unable to protect them⁴.

In the case of Camões, Leonor is returned to patriarchy's close embrace at her death, thereby shutting out any possibility that her reproductive body, her generative identity, might shut out any possibility that her reproductive body, her generative identity, might exist autonomously in the less regulated zone of exploration and early colonization. And the HTM engravings from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries rediagrammed gender as well, and in these cases the weak, famished and hallucinating Manuel was reinvigorated as a figure of triumphant imperial masculinity. In both cases, however, (that of Camões text and in the illustrations of the HTM) Leonor — a woman described in the shipwreck *Historia* as physically hardy, strategically astute and brave — was returned to a state of enfeeblement and hyper-vulnerability.

The Tragedy of Leonor de Sá and Manuel de Sousa Sepúlveda in the *Historia da muy notavel perda do galeam grande Sam Joam...* (1554)

The Portuguese noblewoman Leonor de Sá was shipwrecked in 1552 on the coast of Natal, southern Africa when the galleon São João ran aground on its homeward-bound voyage from Cochin, India. Over a hundred of the 600 slaves, servants, passengers and crew on board were drowned or fatally injured in the shipwreck itself. And while the final tally of lost life was a great tragedy (only 25 survivors actually made

it to Lourenço Marques), the loss of property was sorely regretted as well, for the *São João* was the most richly laden vessel that had left India since sea-trade with Europe had begun (RSEA, v. 1, p. 134).

However, it was more probably the presence of an Iberian woman, who was in the end stripped of her clothing, abandoned by the more fit seamen, and left unprotected on the shores of the strange land, that fueled the many subsequent retellings of this shipwreck, and not the financial losses. That is, it was the intangible loss of dominion over Leonor's (represented and representative) female body, not the tangible loss of slaves, porcelain, fabrics, gold, pepper, and other goods. Leonor's story is a particularly interesting case because she was the first European woman on record to travel along the coast of southern Africa for a relatively long period of time (about five months), and because her presence in a narrative of shipwreck apparently stimulated a number of reconstructions of the event. Emblematic of the brief and tragic Portuguese shipwreck era⁵, the narrative of the wreck of the *São João*, and especially Leonor de Sá's final desperate self-burial in the sand, forms one of the most detailed and widely disseminated accounts of first Europeans⁶ in southern Africa. I will sketch the events surrounding her death briefly, to show how her naked, famished vulnerability was emphasized and how her generative body was effectively rendered invisible in the first published account, the anonymously-authored *Historia da Muy Notavel perda do Galeam grande Sam Joam...*, the English translation of which can be found in Volume 1 of Theal's RSEA (1898).

The account of shipwreck of the *São João* was like many shipwreck stories: a catalogue of misery and loss. Shipwreck survivors in southern Africa during the 1552-1689 period experienced long, grueling months of privation. The difficulties and mishaps were affectingly told and extended, in several cases, even to cannibalism⁷. The survivors of the shipwrecks

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were reduced, by the admission of their own chroniclers, to a subhuman, animalistic state. I will provide just one passage, as typical of the horrors of surviving a shipwreck in the sixteenth century in southern Africa. The narrator of the São Bento (1554) reported that a chronic lack of water drove the band of 322 survivors to stumble along beyond their human capacity, saying that “as diligence and necessity overcome everything, “we found a little muddy water in the footprints of some elephants” (RSEA, v. 1, p. 239, 262), a comment that commends the Portuguese for their diligence and resourcefulness. But he also rehearsed in great detail the depths to which the Portuguese had sunk, both morally and physically:

Anyone who found the bone of an animal bleached with age till it was white as snow ate it reduced to charcoal as if it was a plentiful banquet. Through this want of food the people became so weak that thenceforward they fell into disorder, loitering at the foot of shrubs and falling on the road at every step. All were reduced to such insensibility, and were so affected by their suffering that even those who remained behind did not realize that they must die in a few hours in abandonment, and those who went forward, expecting the same fate themselves at every moment, showed no sorrow at a sight so fitted to call it forth. Thus they passed over each other... as if they had been a herd of irrational animals, grazing in that place, their eyes and attention fixed upon the surrounding country to see if they could discover herb, bone, or insect on which they might lay hands... and if any of these things appeared all rushed to seize it first; and there were often disputes between relations and friends over a locust, beetle or lizard, so great was the want and suffering which made such base things of value (RSEA, v.1, p. 251-252).

The depiction of circumstances by which base things became valuable is a recurrent theme of the shipwreck accounts. This transvaluation of behavior, new uses for tangible

property, and recalibration of human worth indeed preoccupied many of the chroniclers and evidently interested those of the home country audience, judging by the many republications and wide circulation of these tales. But the disruption in social values was perhaps the most radical result of shipwreck, a phenomena Hortense Calvo-Stevenson and Josiah Blackmore have called a disruption of empire (Blackmore Manifest XX; Calvo-Stevenson 8).

In the case of the wreck of the *São João* in 1552, a number of events conspired to hasten the deaths of Leonor de Sá and her husband, Manuel de Sousa Sepúlveda, the Captain of the galleon—along with hundreds of other Portuguese seamen, slaves, and servants who likewise survived the original shipwreck only to die on the overland trek (RSEA, v. 1, p. 128-149). As food became scarce, and as the injured or ill were abandoned along the way, claims to status delaminated; the slaves refused to obey any order and successfully decreed themselves freed; splinter groups of survivors set off on their own, disagreements arose over barter practices and direction of travel. As part of this disintegration of the hierarchies of social value, the improvised litter in which Leonor was carried was abandoned after about three weeks by the uncommandable slaves — and the privileges of her rank discarded with it. It was at this point, several weeks into the trek, that Leonor finally made contact with the land of Africa, and became grounded on the African soil. She began to travel by foot, and it is at this point that she is first explicitly removed from her gender, as she is described as moving through the African landscape as if she were a man (RSEA, v. 1, p. 142). She comforted others, carried her children at times, and — more remarkable, perhaps, for the time period — took a vocal role in administrative debates about how to proceed.

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The overland trek of the survivors of the wreck of the *São João* — unlike the relative success of the trek of the survivors of the *São Alberto* (1593), for instance — on was a disaster in its own right, surpassing at times the horror of the inaugural tragedy, the shipwreck itself. Disorganization, the lack of prior written accounts which might have given the survivors some guidance, harassment by indigenous Africans, brutality towards indigenous Africans, starvation, illness and injuries hampered the progress of the band, eventually bringing the head-injured or malaria-demented Manuel⁵ and his more hardy wife to their death. The final indignity arose out of a series of betrayals that resulted in the stripping of Leonor and her husband, along with the rest of their subgroup of shipwreck survivors. This crucial passage, perhaps one of the most famous exploration-era scenes, commences with an ambiguous attribution:

It is said (*Aqui dizem*) that Dona Leonor would not allow herself to be stripped, but defended herself with blows and struggles, as she preferred that the Kaffirs should kill her rather than to find herself naked before the people, and there is no doubt but that her life would then have ended had Manuel de Sousa not begged her to let herself be stripped, reminding her that all are born naked... One of the sorrows which she felt the most was to see two little children, her sons, crying before her and asking for food, without being able to succour them. Dona Leonor, seeing herself stripped, cast herself upon the ground and covered herself with her hair, which was very long, while she made a pit in the sand in which she buried herself to the waist, and never rose from that spot.

The men, who were still in her company, when they saw Manuel de Sousa and his wife thus stripped, withdrew a little, ashamed to see their captain and Dona Leonor in such a state. Then she

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said to André Vas, the pilot: You see to what we are reduced and that we can go no farther, but must perish here for our sins; go on your way and try to save yourselves, and commend us to God if you should reach India or Portugal at any time.

The account of the wreck of the *São João* was anonymously authored. Though we have no way of knowing, it is possible that the textual authority of a Portuguese man is responsible for some or all of the curious details above, and surely for the syntactic and rhetorical arrangement. If this is the case, these narrative details might be seen as early imperial masculinity's pressing need to stage the sacrifice of the (female) generative body. In this way the death or abandonment of Iberian women on African soil, no doubt deeply troubling to a culture which typically kept women in such close confines¹⁰, could be accounted for, and the elaborate choreography of extreme modesty might be understood as the staging of a kind of compensatory ritual — a ritual meant to assuage readers who might fear women's escape from the dictates of imperial masculinity.

However, it is important to remember that these symbolic interpretations (repudiation, penetration, dominion) hinge on a very brief episode. Leonor was to die within a day, and her children within a few hours, so her renunciation of the maternal and the preservation of her inviolate being by self-burial were quite probably not of any actual consequence. And the dominion I have suggested for Leonor is far from any actual scene of an originary usurpation — as a political entity, the Portuguese asserted no durable land claims in what is now South Africa.

It remains of interest, however, to examine the insistence of the female body to speak itself in its last hours, embedded, as it were, in the contact zone. For while the act of Leonor's self-burial overwhelms what we might call maternal duties, it also extends the domain of her body — which is positioned to overwrite the landscape, to inscribe itself indelibly on the discourses of gender, landscape, and the metaphors of southern African discovery. Her gesture

thus offers an alternative reading of how dominion and heroic sacrifice are asserted in myths of origin concerning southern African — a dominion and a sacrifice that specifically concern the white woman in Africa.

Leonor's attempt to intrude into the narrative and control the reading of the iconic terms of her story is also remarkable, for the time¹¹. Whether the arrangement of visual cues in the passage above are solely attributable to the author of the account (and an argument could be made that the entire scene is fabricated in order to provoke protective anxieties — a case in which a recruiting narrative is developed in order to persuade reluctant Portuguese men to ship out on the trading vessels, despite their high fatality rate¹²) or whether we accept that Leonor is speaking through the author, the reader's gaze is split. The narrator positions Leonor in the beginning of this passage as a woman seeing herself, a woman who is seen through other's eyes. Leonor has appropriated the perspective of those Portuguese, slaves and indigenous beings in whose presence she has been stripped, in order to see herself from their imagined (and horrified) perspective.

That is, Leonor first asks us to imagine the very image of herself that is forbidden: the unclothed noblewoman. And after she buries herself, she commands that what is still visible (her body cut in half and made decent by the enshrouding sand) should be seen, and news of both her shame and her self-designed sacrifice carried back to Portugal. Of course, what she is seeing, in the beginning (and directing us to see) is her own actual, famished nudity, while what she wants seen at the end of this passage is gestural, a tableau that attempts to soothe an expectation of cultural anxiety toward the presence of abandoned or unprotected European women in far distant lands. What is presented, then, is a self divided, cut in half; it is a being, or a body, serving two entangled narratives. In one way

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her body stakes a claim, and enacts the symbolic dominion of Portuguese global ambitions (her buried lower body). In another way she is the still-speaking female — the unburied upper body, still directing the narrative (*diz como*), and even with her death violating gender and maternal expectations.

Nevertheless, even as her body is covered by the enshrouding earth, it is provoking a new anxiety. That is, by taking the earth itself around her, as protective shield, and thereby assuaging the home country's fear of female exposure and vulnerability, she is at the same time giving birth to a new anxiety — that European women might be in a position to stake an independent line of claims to dominion in the less regulated spaces of southern Africa.

Transformed into a landlocked mermaid, Leonor the noblewoman becomes a death object that is revitalized, in its moment of death, as an active penetration. If this half-buried body suggests a flag of conquest, planted in the sand, or a shaft, sunk for a mine, from which the riches of Africa might be extracted, or even a burial as avatar, then imperial masculinity (that is, the agents of imperial masculinity who controlled the archives) might have read it as an image of virility by which the topography is mastered, even by a woman, and even in death. This would be of grave concern to subsequent chroniclers, as I will show below.

The Tragedy of Leonor de Sá and Manuel de Sousa in Luís de Camões' *Os Lusíadas* (1573)

Twenty-one years after the wreck of the *São João*, Luís de Camões recycles the pitiful death scene of Manuel and Leonor as part of Adamastor's prophetic warning to Vasco da Gama and his fleet, as they round the Cape of Good Hope. *Os Lusíadas* was well known up to the nineteenth century (four

complete English translations were published in the 1880s), but during the twentieth century and the rise of post colonial studies, it has dropped out of Anglophone literature curricula¹³. Camões used the tempestuous weather of the southernmost tip of Africa and the ancients' fears of the malign influences of the torrid zone to summon up the figure of Adamastor in Canto V of *Os Lusíadas*. Adamastor¹⁴ is positioned by Camões to criticize the global ambitions of the sometimes reckless Portuguese kings, and warns of the dangers (worse than death) of the *carreira da Índia*. In the prophecy, Adamastor says that the Portuguese seamen will encounter immense variety of ruin, but the particularity of that ruin is located securely in the only actual example he gives of the horrors of a shipwreck: the deaths of Manuel and Leonor.

It is not clear whether Camões knew of the fates of the shipwrecked Manuel and Leonor from the published version or from general maritime lore. Camões apparently sailed for India in March of 1553, but the first account of the wreck of the *São João* was not published until 1554. However, the text conceivably could have made it to the Indies, as during the 1550-1570 period (roughly the dates of Camões sojourn in India) approximately 100 ships made the outward bound journey to the Indies (Boxer, 1969, p. 1415-1825).

In any case, the relevant recasting of the death scene of Manuel and Leonor reads as follows, in Leonard Bacon's somewhat clumsy 1955 translation. Adamastor, turned to stone on the headlands of the Cape of Good Hope because he had dared to desire and then attempted to embrace a bathing nymph, addresses da Gama's fleet and issues his forecast of immense ruin. He warns that the miseries suffered by the Portuguese in their pursuance of global maritime dominance will be so great that death itself shall be the least ill of all (Canto V, p. 44). He then introduces the unhappy couple of Manuel and Leonor as exemplars of the suffering that will befall those whose

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immoderate desire for the riches of the Indies drives them forward. I will quote this section (Stanzas 46–48) in its entirety.

Here will another come, of fairest fame,
A knight, a lover, and of liberal mind,
Bringing with him that most delicious dame,
Love, of his mercy for his love designed,
Whom there said fortune and dark fate shall claim
Here in my country, angry and unkind,
Which, though it let them through rough shipwreck live,
'Tis but the sight of greater ills to give'.

Starving to death, they shall see children dear,
Begot and born in love beyond compare,
And the fierce Caffirs, envious of her gear
From the sweet lady all her vesture tear,

And limbs, so beautiful and crystal clear,
Naked in the sun and frost of windy air,
After the long march when her delicate feet
Have suffered the beach sands' ferocious heat.

Their eyes shall see, such as escape again
From so much misadventure and distress
The lovers in their misery remain
Deep in the hot implacable wilderness.
There, when for bitter tears of grief and pain
The very stones seem not so merciless,
Those two, in close embrace, their souls shall free
From the fair prison of their agony (Canto V, p. 46–48)¹⁵

Here the heroic, physically strong, and strategically astute Leonor is rendered as a delicious dame (*formosa dama*), though there is no mention of her beauty in the shipwreck account. Reference to her beautiful and crystal-clear limbs (*linda*

dama... /Os cristalnos membros e perclaros) are inventions as well. However, many details of Leonor's demise are faithful to the prose account — the presence of her children dear at the death scene and the tearing from her of all her vesture, for instance. These details reiterate the bare facts recorded by the anonymous narrator of the shipwreck account: Leonor walked long distances before she died, she was stripped just prior to death, and her children and husband died along with her.

Camões, however, alters one significant detail: for the death scene itself, he encircles Leonor in her husband's arms, rather than depict her embedded in the soil of southern Africa. By doing so, he has re-assigned Leonor's transgressive role as penetrator — she is returned to European patriarchy's close embrace, her nakedness shielded by the interposition of her husband's protective arms (rather than the soil of Africa, the sanctuary provided by the original narrator) and the emblematic nature of her dying gesture is made less intimate with the soil of Africa, less symbolically possessive. And Manuel, who was reported as very ill and not in his right mind by the historical text, was reinvigorated and made heroic by Camões' epic poem.

An early historian, Manuel de Faria e Sousa, provides a similar death scene, but he also amends the tale, preferring to underscore, or perhaps to manufacture, some additional explanatory motivations. In Tome II-Chapter IX of his *Asia Portuguesa* (1647) he explains that Leonor endeavored to defend herself to no purpose and with hazard of life, till her husband persuaded her to choose the lesser evil [to permit herself to be stripped]; but she thought it less ill to die than to be seen naked by any but her husband (RSEA, v. 1, p. 18) (my emphasis), and it is in this version that the gesture (of self burial) is seen as an action produced by extreme modesty. Indeed, Faria e Sousa attributes to Leonor herself (she thought) the notion that the

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sight of a woman's unclothed body is the sole province of her husband, asking her to ventriloquize the possessive prerogatives of early imperial masculinity.

A further alteration occurs when Faria e Sousa describes the physical details of Leonor's self-burial. He reports that slaves stood around her, sheltering her, while she sits down on the sand, [and makes] a hole where she covered herself to the waist (RSEA, v.1, p. 19). This slight change has repaired an implausibility in the original account, for hair long enough and abundant enough to effectively cover a naked woman who is hard at work digging out her own grave, would have been quite impossible.

Without launching into a full-fledged analysis of textual changes, I nevertheless want to emphasize that in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, a European woman's presence in furthestmost Africa evidently generated considerable textual uneasiness. That this particular noblewoman's nakedness and vulnerability was repaired by the interposition of scraps of clothing¹⁶, the encompassing sand, the bodies of slaves, or a husband's embracing arms signifies efforts to recast Leonor into a semi-protected figure who is not entirely exposed to the eyes, the desires, or the reproductive designs of any indigenous being. But alterations to the figure of Leonor in later versions of the *História Trágico-marítima* (first published in 1773-1775) are even more dramatic.

Visual Depictions of the the Death Scene of Leonor and Manuel in the *história trágico-marítima*, Portuguese Histories, and a contemporary Reconstruction in South África of an Early Portuguese Landing

During the nineteenth century, the *História Trágico-marítima* (HTM) (1773-1775) was part of a small group of texts

judged greatest literature of the world. But, along the *Os Lusíadas*, its place has been diminished in the so-called canon, at least outside of Lusophone countries, and is known of, but not known. There has been no complete English translation of these shipwreck accounts, though C.R. Boxer published four shipwreck tales in *The Tragic History of the Sea* (1958), and three tales in *Further Selections from the Tragic History of the Sea (1559-1565)* (1968). Josiah Blackmore has edited a new edition of Boxer's *Tragic History of the Sea* (2003) and this work includes a new translation of the account of the wreck of the São João.

However, many nineteenth century versions of the HTM, or historical treatises, contain illustrations. It is instructive to look at what happens to the figures of Leonor and Manuel in the illustrations of the wreck of the Sao João. In the text, Leonor is portrayed as showing strength, as she carried her children at times and walked unaided, without shoes or adequate clothing, for four months. She is described as capable of strategic acumen, as she voiced the strongest objections to the group giving up their arms. When her husband overruled her, and the band gave up their weapons at the insistence of a local chief, the survivors were quickly overpowered and their clothing and other things taken from them. In short she is depicted, in the original historical account, as strong, wise and heroic. On the other hand, her husband Manuel is portrayed as weak, vacillating, incapable of leadership and unable to hold the group together. Because the account emphasizes his head pain, hallucinations, and poor judgment he was most probably suffering from a head injury or cerebral malaria. The important point, however, is that the relative positions of the two are reversed in illustrations of this event, most dramatically in the later editions of the HTM, during the era of high imperialism.

The earliest image of the deaths of Leonor and Manuel was reproduced in Jean Louis Huber-Simon Deperthes'

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Histoire des naufrages (1795). It shows Leonor reclining into a depression in the sand, leaning back against her servant, and wholly exposed to the two Portuguese men who hover around her. Her children and another adult man are either dead or insensible on the ground beside her, and her husband is leaning against a palm tree, still fully clothed. On the brow of a hill in the background, dark figures cart off the spoils of their ambush.

In this engraving we see that the unclothed noblewoman is the center of the illustration, and the clothed husband is grieving at far left side of the illustration. Unlike his textual portrayal as a ruined man, crawling about for beetles to eat and stripped naked by the Africans, in this illustration he is still standing, seemingly well fed, and fully, though rudely, clothed. With his face in his hands, he is pictured as unable to bear the sight of his unclothed wife, while the three figures surrounding her are focused directly on her. Other departures from the textual record are also significant: Leonor does not appear to have scooped out her own grave, but has rather been passively guided into it. Because her husband is fully clothed, the illustration suggests that Manuel successfully resisted the Africans' efforts to strip him. Yet, in this illustration, he is the only one who cannot face her nudity.

Faria e Sousa's suggestion that it was the sole province of a husband to see a woman's unclothed body is, in this engraving, reversed. In the illustration, it is the husband himself, the exemplar of imperial masculinity, who cannot bear the sight of the unclothed noblewoman, and the illustration suggests his inability to face Leonor's nakedness in this situation might be seen as a turning away from a stark reality in the era of early exploration and colonization: the loss of control over the reproductive bodies of European women, possibly naked and splayed out in front of servants, seamen, and indigenous people. Indeed, for the global trade and colonizing projects to proceed,

Europe had to quite determinedly turn away from this spectacle. Yet, as the illustration suggests, even if the strategic methodology of colonialism was bent on not facing this more or less constructed female hyper-vulnerability, the home country public, the reading public, was evidently titillated by this opportunity to image such a dangerous eventuality as the exposed and hyper-vulnerable European women.

Another illustration of the deaths of Leonor and Manuel is reproduced in Josiah Blackmore's *Manifest Perdition*. It is from an early nineteenth-century history, the *Factus Memoráveis da Historia de Portugal* (1826). In this version, Leonor is exposed in the foreground, and rendered insensible, while Manuel is grieving over her, unclothed this time, but still physically vital and seemingly well-nourished (as is she). As in the first image, Manuel has been returned to a position of strength and heroic virility and Leonor has been recast in the form of a limp figure of passive hyper-vulnerability. The five bodies at her side suggest a similar exhaustion, or death. While the original account of the shipwreck of the *São João* did suggest that Manuel was the last one alive of the family, it also established that he had already gone stark raving mad and indeed died within a day of his wife's death. This illustration, however, reanimates him, and recasts him in a heroic light, and his wife is altered as well: she is unburied, fully exposed to the presumably scandalized viewer and either dead or nearly so.

In one of the latest depictions, from an 1896 edition of the *História Trágico-marítima*, Manuel's strength is even greater. He is not only still standing, but he is carrying his weak and insensible wife; from the angle of her neck she appears to be already dead. And Leonor's half-sized grave is a vertical grave, not a scooped out depression in the sand; a slave is evidently trying it out for size (will it effectively cover her lower body?); the slave has quite possibly meant to be seen as having dug the grave herself, and by being depicted in

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the grave, has taken Leonor's place in the scene. The lamentations are generalized, the children are nowhere in sight, and Manuel's graceful posture, with his weight on one leg, further invites us to see him as unimpaired by five months of starvation and exposure. Only his overgrown hair and beard suggest that he himself has been stranded on southern African shores for an extended period of time. This is the most marked enfeeblement of Leonor, whose body is presented as a sexualized offering to early colonialism, and it is also the most dramatic re-virilization of Manuel in the illustrations I have found.

On display in the Reading Room of the Cullen Library of the Witwatersrand University in Johannesburg, South Africa, is an image called *T'Kama Adamastor* commissioned by a committee at Witwatersrand University in Johannesburg, South Africa, and painted by Cyril Coetzee. It was publicly unveiled in 1999. This fourth image I highlight is a useful point of comparison, for the painting is also meant to reconstruct an early encounter between Portuguese seamen and indigenous people. Its narrative content is based on André Brink's *Cape of Storms: the First Life of Adamastor* (1993). Brink's satirical and ribald novella centers on the desires of an indigenous chief, T'Kama Adamastor, for a stranded Portuguese noblewoman (or a woman who had landed temporarily on African shores). When the chief captures her, and tries to have intercourse, his penis grows larger and larger, until it is so unwieldy that he must wrap it twice around his waist.

Any arousal or attempt at intercourse gives rise to a uncontrollable and gigantic phallus, an appendage that T'Kama refers to as *Big Bird*. Now Cyril Coetzee, the artist of the painting, has used the narrative elements of Brink's novel to re-envision a founding or encounter scene, and in the process has attempted to satirize and overturn the prohibitions on interracial sexuality, prohibitions which were legally entrenched for over half a century in South Africa and are still very much

the social norm. In Brink's novella, *Cape of Storms*, T'kama, the indigenous chief, is in the end murdered for his transgressive desires, and the indigenous group to which he belongs is punished by over-the-top bad luck (though these eventualities are not illustrated in Coetzee's painting). In this way, the hyper-vulnerability of the white woman in Africa is re-encrypted, and the fatal consequences of transgressions concerning such women are reiterated.

As in the cases of the previous three images, we have a problematic gesture towards social reconciliation, and we can detect double discourse — a bold offering or sacrifice of European woman, but an almost simultaneous retraction of the offer. In addition to this inverted staging of the sacrifice of the European woman, Coetzee has brought into the picture indigenous African women. However, the caricature he makes of them (hoop-eared and subjected to a sexualized baptism) fails to repair any stereotype. Indeed, the women of Africa are barely mentioned in the Brink novella from which Coetzee takes his cue, and so the right side of the painting (the 'future' of this over-symbolized panorama) has no comment on what might happen to African women after the advent of the encounter era's sanctified molestations.

Indigenous South American and Caribbean women encountered and described on the voyage of the São Francisco (1596)

Despite its inclusion in the third volume of the *História trágico-marítima*, the voyage of the *Nao São Francisco* (1596) was regarded not as a tragedy, but as a *sucesso*. Though the ship was over three years before it returned to Lisbon, and it never made it to the East Indies, the chronicler of the voyage,

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Padre Gaspar Afonso, collected important information and wrote an engaging account of wandering first to several ports in Brazil, and then around the Caribbean. James Duffy calls the Afonso perpetually inquisitive and his account stands out from the others not only because of its lack of truly dire tragedy, but also because of his emphasis on natural history (*Shipwreck and Empire*, p.103). A good deal of the narrative describes the island of Puerto Rico, and Duffy finds that Afonso is the only shipwreck-era chronicler who is rhapsodic in his description of the indigenous peoples.

However, it is Afonso's description of two groups of indigenous women that is of interest to my comparison. When the galleon was landed, near present day Bahia, the sailors were greeted rather formally. Afonso describes their reception and the general innocence and good cheer of the people and then goes on to specifically describe the women's conception of tragedy and ritual:

In one of these villages... the lamentation of crying women related what hardships and perils could have befallen us. [But] after this ritual, the women dried their tears so quickly [that it seemed to me] they had only shed them out of observance of ceremony. Then, the friendliest reception and party followed, one as impressive as something we would do for a very dear guest (HTM, v. 3, p. 180).

In this case Afonso is commending the hospitality of the people, but also suggesting that the lamentations are either duplicitous or superficial. It is surprising that he could not imagine that the tears and crying were ritual recitations of their own woes, or the recitation of the woes of other shipwrecked Portuguese whom they had observed or heard about. Nevertheless, even with the potential for misunderstanding, he infers tremendous

knowledge on the part of the women, and his suggestion that they might know what hardships and perils could have befallen the Portuguese grants these particular indigenous women the status of historians of the encounter era.

The second instance in which indigenous women are granted high status is in Puerto Rico, where the ill seamen submitted themselves to the medical know-how of the healers, after first allowing the incapacitated seamen to be transported by horseback to the hospital. Here is Afonso's description "[B] y means of a brazen knife that they used for cutting my stomach, and a homemade medicine mixed with sulfur and eggs, the doctors of that region, which were women", cured them. After this trusting in the native healing arts, even calling the women Galenos after the well-known Greek healer (131-201 A.D.), Afonso and his band crossed the island from North to South to cure themselves further in the city of San Domingo.

For the Portuguese men to submit themselves to a knife-wielding indigenous woman who went on to apply a poultice of sulfur/egg poultice is a remarkable reversal, for elsewhere in this era, it was the shipwrecked sailors who attempted to gain a political advantage by healing the indigenous people with things like urine and clay. This is, indeed, the second instance where a chronicler of the Caribbean and South America attributes medical skill, historical knowledge or sympathetic compassion to the indigenous women.

While I am not sufficiently steeped in these early accounts from both southern Africa and the Caribbean to extend the obvious conclusion — that race matters — to sixteenth-century texts of Portuguese exploration and trade, these examples seem to point to a compulsion for the chroniclers to encode the shipwrecked Iberian woman in a discourse of hyper-vulnerability, and to grant a relatively honorable status to Amerindian women as healers and custodians of history.

Notes

- ¹ Indeed, as Bhekeize Peterson has pointed out in relation to South Africa, colonial archives are typically poorly organized to reveal the full range of even existing voices. H. I. E. Dhlomo determined many years ago (in terms of what was in the 1930s called the *native* archives) that the material that was available tended to prejudice and make insecure black Africans position and future in the organization of the colonial state (PETERSON, 2002, p. 29). A similar complaint could be made about the archival place of Iberian women in contact era texts.
- ² The British Library holds a number of pamphlets or tracts which reproduce the story of the wreck of the *São João*. See BL 1444 f. 18, the first version published in 1554 and now bound with other *relações*; BL c.32 e 34 a version from 1564; BL 10095 b. 37, a pamphlet printed with license from Antonio Alvarez by Frey Bertholameu Ferreyra, with *Prologo* in 1592; and the 1627 (1633?) edition, also printed by Antonio Alvarez. These editions show no significant variation in the scene of the death of Manuel and Leonor. Bernardo Gomes de Brito's compilation of Portuguese shipwrecks, the *História trágico-marítima (HTM)*, of which the most well-known account is the wreck of the *São João* is the most well-known collection of Portuguese shipwreck accounts. Josiah Blackmore has recently published a new translation of the wreck of the *São João* in a new edition of *The Tragic History of the Sea* (2003); Manuel de Faria e Sousa's *Asia Portuguesa* (1666-1674) contains a retelling of the story (Tome II, Part II, Chapter IX, *RSEA*, v. 1, 1898, p. 18-19. The earliest version of the story held at the British Library was the basis for transcription and translation presented in G.M. Theal's *Records of South Eastern Africa (RSEA)* (1898-1903). Theal asserts that because the original from which he transcribed the *Account* in *RSEA* was published soon after the event and under the authority of the Portuguese government, it is the most reliable. See head note in *RSEA*, v. 1, 1898, p. 108.
- ³ The third volume, which contains the account of the *São Francisco*, was apparently published as part of this work, but not actually compiled by De Brito.
- ⁴ C.R. Boxer comments extensively on the presence of Portuguese women on early trade expeditions. See *Mary and Misogyny* (1975), *The*

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Portuguese Seaborne Empire 1415-1825 (1969), and *Race Relations in the Portuguese Colonial Empire, 1415-1825* (1963). The conundrum of the exploration age was this: without the presence of European women on the voyages to India, and without the administrators in India traveling with their wives, mistresses or prostitutes, sexual contact between the Portuguese men and indigenous women or slaves would eventually produce a population with mixed blood and therefore the possibility of mixed allegiances — a dilution of political control that presumably gave rise to considerable unease for the home country financiers and nationalists wishing to give birth to a new era of Portuguese global dominance. For this reason wives, mistresses, prostitutes, *orfas de El-Rei*, or Crown Orphans — (respectable girls of marriageable age, who were provided with dowries and shipped out to Goa or Cochin — up to 20 per year) and even (presumably unmarriageable) nuns were present on the the galleons headed for the east; Boxer estimates as many as twelve women were present on the outgoing galleons during the first hundred years of trade with the Indies. The *São Paulo*, for one instance, was shipwrecked with 20 women on board.

- ⁵ The golden age of Portuguese maritime supremacy is usually dated from the sixteenth into the mid-seventeenth century. The shipwreck era falls a bit past the mid-seventeenth century. Even though trade dominance had been lost, commercial trading voyages to India continued through the eighteenth century, though at a much reduced level.
- ⁶ The galleon known as the Soares wreck was earlier, 1502, but there is no narrative account. See Malcolm Turner's *Shipwreck and Salvage in South Africa* (1972) Furthermore, The Phoenicians purportedly circumnavigated Africa in the late sixth or early fifth century B.C., and Hanno the Carthaginian's *Periplus* describes a fifth-century mission of sixty warships and thirty thousand colonists with food supplies and other necessities which was said to have gone around Africa. However, there is little textual evidence of Hanno having gone farther than the Horn of Africa, and no archaeological evidence of even the first part of this voyage. Pliny disregarded Hanno's account because there remained no memory or trace of the settlements, even along the closer West African coast. And Herodotus mentions dismissively a voyage by the Phoenicians, though he supplies a bit of astrological information (that the sun was on the right hand) that suggests this voyage might indeed have taken place. See A. N. Oikonomides' *Hanno the Carthaginian, Periplus, Or Circumnavigation of Africa*, 1977, p. 11-15 Finally, Gavin Menzies claims, in *1421: The Year China Discovered America* (2002),

that a Chinese fleet passed, and landed, on southern African shores, though most of his evidence for these voyages is the discovery of shards of porcelain found along the coast. While it seems quite possible that the porcelain in question is from Portuguese shipwrecks, Menzies does not seem to have consulted the narratives of Portuguese shipwreck survivors, many of which reported spilled crates of porcelain just off shore and most of which reported spotting fragments presumed to have been deposited from earlier shipwrecks along the littoral. Finally, it is hardly necessary to acknowledge that as far as touching land, Bartholomew Dias, Vasco da Gama, and Almeida, for instance, preceded the shipwrecked bands of Portuguese. However, these explorers were on land for a few hours or days, and recorded only a few sentences or paragraphs of their encounter.

⁷ Cannibalism was documented in the case of the survivors of the wrecks of the *São Bento* (1554) and the *São João Baptista* (1647), for instance.

⁸ The captain is described as incapable of leadership; he suffered in his brain from constant watching and many hardships ... [H]e was not in his right mind, and he complained greatly of his head, and they tied bandages around it. He was very ill and not in his perfect senses. Cf. *RSEA*, v. 1, 1898, p. 141-143.

⁹ The relevant passage from the 1554 *relação* of the *História da Muy Notavel perda do Galeão grande São João: Aqui dizem que Dona Lianor nam se deyxava despir, e que as punhadas e as bosetadas se defendia... Hum dos grandes trabalhos que sentam hera [que ambos tinha] verem dous meninos pequenos [muito criacas] seus filhos diante de si chorando, pedindo de comer, sem lhe poderem valer. E vendose dona Lianor despida, lançoise logo no chão, e cubriose toda com os seus cabellos, que herao muito compridos, fazendo húa cova na areia, onde se meteo ate a cintura [cinta], sem se mais erger dalli... Os homens, que estava ainda em sua companhia, quando virao a Manuel de Sousa, e sua molher despídos, arredarase delles hum pedaço, pella vergonha que ouveram de ver asileu seu Capitam e dona Lianor. Entem dise ella a André Vaz o Piloto. Bem vedes como estamos, e que ja nam podemos pasar daqui: e que aqui avemos de acabar... e se sordes a India, e a Portugal em albam tempo, dizey como nos deixastes a Manuel de Sousa e a mi co meus filhos.*

¹⁰ According to a footnote in C.R. Boxer's *Four Centuries of Portuguese Expansion 1415-1825: A Succinct Survey*. (1961): 61, the commonplace attitude in the sixteenth century was that the Portuguese noblewoman

was so secluded that she left the home only twice in her lifetime: for her christening and her marriage.

- ¹¹ Yet the early Portuguese exploration and occupation discourses are not without reference to women. C.R. Boxer's *Mary and Misogyny* (1975) examines accounts in which Portuguese women take up arms, engage in legendary sadism toward their slaves (such as the case of *La Quintrala*), and wield substantial political and economic powers on occasion.
- ¹² In the 1620s, for instance, outbound ships were staffed with men who were imprisoned in irons until the ship was at sea. See C.R. Boxer, *The Portuguese Seaborne Empire*, 1967, p. 10-11.
- ¹³ Indeed, it might be seen as the founding Orientalist text, yet it has been typically ignored by postcolonial critics and appears nowhere in Said, Spivak, Young, Bhabha, or other theorists of postcoloniality. However, Yale University recently redesigned its world literature survey course (2001), and it now includes selections from *The Lusíads*, alongside the *Aeneid*, Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*, Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, and other classics of the Western canon. See Vilashini Cooppan's *World Literature and Global Theory: Comparative Literature for the New Millennium* (18). Camões masterpiece has remained in print in Portugal, and was widely translated even from the beginning. The Introduction to *The Lusíads* by William Mickles (1778) suggests that there were two printings in Portuguese in 1573, followed by two Italian, four Spanish, two French, three Latin translations, and one Hebrew translation published within the first one hundred years. The sole English translation available before Mickles, done by Fanshawe (1655), is classified by Mickles as "unfaithful and unpoetical" (XXXVII-XXXIX). In total, there have been eight major English translations of *The Lusíads*: Sir Richard Fanshawe(c) (1655), William Julius Mickle (1798), Sir Richard Burton (1880), Robert French Duff (1880), J. J. Aubertin (1884), William C. Atkinson (1884), Guy Butler (Canto V only) in 1987, and Landeg White (1997).
- ¹⁴ Adamastor, a god in the Greek mode, is a figure that has been interpreted in South Africa variously as rapist, transgressor, seer and prophet, even bumbling romancer. Thetis is the object of his desire, and was turned to stone at the onset of an embrace, and morphed into the surrounding sea, apparently to be a constant reminder of her unattainability. In South Africa, Adamastor is widely but not unanimously considered the "root" or the "foundation" of white writing in that country. This claim was

first made by John Purves, in a short-lived pro-union periodical (*The State*), in 1909, and then taken up by Sydney R. Welch in *South Africa under John III* (1948), Stephen Gray *Southern African Literature: An Introduction* (1979), Laurens Van der Post makes the claim in *The Turbott Wolfe Affair* and Malvern van Wyk Smith echoes it in *Shades of Adamastor* (1988) and *Grounds of Contest* (1990). Dorothy Driver reviews and refutes Gray's claim in *Women and Nature, Women as Objects of Exchange: Towards a Feminist Analysis of South African Literature*, (1992) and Jonathon Crewe recycles this position in *Recalling Adamastor: Literature as Cultural Memory in 'White' South Africa* (1999). Cyril Coetzee (6) and Andries Walter Oliphant (61) also make reference to Gray's claim in *T'Kama Adamastor: Invention of Africa in a South African Painting* (2001), edited by Ivan Vladislavic. J.M. Coetzee skirts the figure of Adamastor entirely in his examination of the (white) foundations of southern African literature in *White Writing* (1988). More remarkable than the fact that a figure from a Portuguese epic would dominate the literature of a southern African country which has a very small Portuguese political and cultural presence, is the claim that Adamastor stands for the black man's violent desire for the white woman, an interpretation I have disputed at length in *Ultramarooned* (2005). As Lucy Graham has pointed out in *Racializing the Colonial Epic*, Purves' initial claim appears to be a blatant strategy to unite whites under a banner of a single literary progenitor for political purposes, and for this reason it is surprising that subsequent critics have taken up this foundational status for Adamastor so uncritically.

15 46

- Outro também virá de honrada fama,
Liberal, cavaleiro, enamorado,
E consigo trará a formosa dama
Que Amor por grã mercê lhe terá dado.
Triste ventura e negro fado os chama
Neste terreno meu, que duro e irado
Os deixará dam cru naufrágio vivos
Para verem trabalhos excessivos.

47

- Verão morrer com fome os filhos caros,
Em tanto amor gerados e nascidos;
Verão os Cafres ásperos e avaros
Tirar a linda dama seus vestidos;
Os cristalinos membros e perclaros

A calma, ao frio, ao ar verão despídos,
Depois de ter pisada longamente
Co'os delicados pés a areia ardente.

48

- E verão mais os olhos que escaparem
De tanto mal, de tanta desventura,
Os dois amantes míseros ficarem
Na férvida e implacável espessura.
Ali, depois que as pedras abrandarem
Com lágrimas de dor, de mágoa pura,
Abraçados as almas solitário
Da formosa e misérrima prisão.

- ¹⁶ Even the original 1554 version included an inconsistency about clothing. First it was announced that all of the band had been stripped by the Africans, then, several paragraphs later, a mantilla was produced (from a slave woman) with which Manuel covered her upper body.

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