

and pure, / Vanquishes every grandiloquent writing!" We cannot assert on the basis of this passage that Camões felt his epic surpassed the poems of Homer and Vergil. Camões merely thought that the exploits of the Portuguese outdid those described in the earlier epics. And Vasco da Gama and Camões had ample reason to believe that what is told in the poem reflects the truth. Sober and reliable Portuguese historians support the account. We should keep separate what the poet says as poet and what he says from the lips of his character. Counter to the notion of Camões's overweening pride are passages of humility, where he admits his lack of talent (10.145.1–2, 10.154.1–2).

Fifth is the accusation that Camões is guilty of self-pity, supported by the lament of misfortunes he voices to the nymphs of the Tagus and Mondego. I take this passage as a plea that they make his poetic powers equal to the noble deeds he celebrates (7.78–87).

Sixth, the criticism that Camões was nationalistic and imperialistic condemns him by the standards of 1996 for being a child of the sixteenth century. Part of the miracle of *Os Lusíadas* is that by 1572 Portugal, the tinier part of the Iberian peninsula, should have achieved so much and found so admirable a spokesman.

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Reply:

Edgar C. Knowlton, Jr., makes two valid points: "nunco" is a typographical error for "nunca," and a proper translation of "Chamei-me Adamastor," in context, would be "I called myself Adamastor." My mistranslation does not, I think, invalidate doubts about whether Adamastor was the titan's "real" name (my main point), though it does undermine the faint implication that the opening of *Moby-Dick* might refer to Camões (my whimsical aside). "Tormentoto" occurs only within quotation marks in a footnote, where I correctly cite Norwood Andrews, who correctly quotes Melville.

The rest of Knowlton's arguments misrepresent my piece. Readers are free to make up their own minds about the truthfulness, self-pity, and nationalism of *Os Lusíadas*. But only an anxious defensiveness toward the poem, protecting it from any eyes but those of loyal Lusitanians, could lead to the view that my remarks are *accusations*.

Is it hubris for an epic poem to begin by claiming that, unlike others, it alone tells the truth? Of course. Aside from its fantastic episodes (like that of Adamastor), the poem presents a highly colored version of da Gama's

voyage, a Portuguese "truth" adverse to African or Mohammedan "truths." My point, however, is not to condemn Camões's pride but to suggest that his evocation of Adamastor is unusually "truthful," precisely because the figure cannot be distinguished from the perceptions that conjure it up.

Similarly, my emphasis on the self-pity that suffuses Adamastor's story as well as Camões's is not condemnation but an attempt to characterize *Os Lusíadas* as an epic of longing, in which suffering "serves to palliate or humanize the appropriations of the imperialistic epic" (219). Far from a "criticism," this description balances that of some recent critics (especially Richard Helgerson and David Quint) whose view of the acquisitive and imperialistic thrust of the poem is much more unsparing. Camões finished his work when the promise of Portuguese empire was fading, and the deep sense of grievance that he expresses, along with forlorn hopes for renewal of national glory, makes the poem much richer than triumphant patriotism alone could ever achieve.

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PMLA's Criteria of Publication

To the Editor:

Domna Stanton's March Editor's Column fails to understand what the diminishing number of submissions to *PMLA* from senior faculty members and others signifies (111 [1996]: 199–203). It's a boycott, undertaken without collusion by educated people who have concluded that *PMLA* selects articles according to narrow political criteria (no Marxist, feminist, or multiculturalist premise, however counterintuitive or outrageous, may be questioned) and who see clearly that *PMLA* cares little for intellectual rigor and stylistic competence, which have long since been demoted to subsidiary importance. Many scholars will want to maintain membership in the MLA, for various practical reasons, but will not want to participate in the journal.

Stanton's column offers a case in point. It's essentially nothing more than a denunciation, although it stealthily conceals its dogmatic thesis until the antepenultimate paragraph. Stanton dismisses those who complain about tendentious criteria and lack of respect for traditional scholarship as sufferers from "idéés fixes" that, in the grotesque diction of her poststructuralist prose, "inscribe the myth of exclusion that seems to permeate North American society today, the sense that someone different

from me is being privileged and has become the preferred other at my expense” (202). It’s as though the critics of the journal must be one and the same as the supporters of Pat Buchanan.

Stanton presumably uses the verb *to inscribe* without embarrassment. Twelve years ago in a graduate seminar the professor sternly warned me that my use of the same Derrideanism would provoke laughter if I didn’t remove it from my paper before I read the text before an audience. But *PMLA*’s enshrinement of clichés, its insensitivity to language, and its slavish devotion to sectarian politics most emphatically do embarrass those who still place a high value on the impartial pursuit of knowledge, on clarity of expression, and on independence of thought. *PMLA* is simply not open “to all scholarly methods and theoretical perspectives,” as its charter claims.

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A Correction to an Exchange on the Hermeneutic Circle

To the Editor:

In a recent letter to the Forum (111 [1996]: 465–66), I point out that Frederick Amrine, in his remarks in “The Status of Evidence: A Roundtable” (111 [1996]: 21–31), gives an erroneous report of the conception of the hermeneutic circle that appears in my essay “Belief and Resistance: A Symmetrical Account” (*Questions of Evidence: Proof, Practice, and Persuasion across the Disciplines*, ed. James Chandler, Arnold I. Davidson, and Harry Harootian [Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1994] 139–53).

Whereas Amrine claims that “[t]he notion [there] is that in the hermeneutic circle you begin and end in the same place and don’t ever open yourself up to dialectical or dialogic interaction with possibly disconfirming evidence” (27), that idea of hermeneutic circularity is explicitly rejected in my essay, where I write, “Our relation to the universe . . . is both dynamic and reciprocal. . . . The hermeneutic circle does not permit access or escape to an uninterpreted reality; but we do not keep going around in the same path” (151–52). In a reply seeking to justify his remarks (111 [1996]: 466–67), Amrine cites a different passage from “Belief and Resistance,” charging me with “den[ying] having written what is plain on the page” (467). What can or cannot be plain on any page is, of course, part of the general issue here, but I am content to let readers judge for themselves the validity of Amrine’s claims and charges. In assessing the textual evidence, however, they should be aware that Amrine’s paraphrase of the passage he cites (466) reverses my characterizations of, respectively, “constructivist-interactionist accounts of knowledge” and “traditional epistemologies.” They appear in my text as follows:

The former [i.e., “constructivist-interactionist accounts of knowledge”] stress the *participation* of prior belief in the perception of present evidence—that is, the hermeneutic circle. The latter [i.e., “traditional epistemologies”] insist on the possibility of the *correction* of prior belief by present evidence—that is, the possible rupture of the hermeneutic circle by what is posited as autonomous, observer-independent reality—and also on its normative occurrence, as in (genuine) science. (“Belief and Resistance,” 140–41)

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