

Fleming, John V. *Luís de Camões: The Poet as Scriptural Exegete*. Woodbridge, UK: Tamesis, 2017. xi + 219 pp. Notes. Appendices. Works Cited. Index.

The book that Fleming dedicates to Luís de Camões's poem *Sobre os rios que vão* constitutes a substantial addition to the scholarship on one of the most studied lyrical Camoenian works. Most critics have been fascinated by the compositional harmony and the originality with which Camões modulates an immense amount of scriptural and literary references, as well as by the procedures that combine a metric form unique to the Iberian poetic tradition, the *redondilha maior*, with the gloss of the biblical psalm *Super flumina Babylonis*. Fleming follows established methods of comparative literary scholarship, and his approach is strengthened by the intellectual path of a Princeton University scholar.

The book is divided into seven chapters. The first chapter, "Poetry as Exegesis," presents the essay's subject. Fleming's considerations about the history of allegorical interpretation culminate in an elucidative and sustained analysis of some of the images used in the poem, particularly those whose obscurity has attracted the greatest critical scrutiny. The second chapter, "The Psalm," presents the concepts of *intertextuality* and of *imitatio*, although the first one is not considered in the Bakhtinian sense. He makes use of the latter in several key moments to explore its role in connecting different "sources" (the judicious quotation marks are Fleming's own) or ideas. The relationship with the gloss of the *Super flumina* psalm, written by the sixteenth-century poet Jorge de Montemayor, who was Portuguese by birth, is devalued, since Montemayor's text is defined predominantly by morality and generality, while Camões's version grants individuality a much wider scope. Fleming's consideration of the dialogue between poetry and music leads him to conclude that the redeeming *canticum novo*, for which the poet yearns, is opposed to the "old song." This reaffirms the claim that Christian religiosity and the Orpheus myth intersect in the poem. The third chapter, entitled "The *Eclogue of Theodulus*," explores the parallel with the eponymous composition, which is considered an essential piece of contemporaneous pedagogy. The fourth chapter, "The *Conversión* of Juan Boscán," explores this poem's role as the principal "source" of *Sobre os rios*. This link is then extended in the following chapter, "Boscán and Some Predecessors," to include several authors. Here Fleming also highlights the evolution from sin to redemption. The sixth chapter, dedicated to "Numbers," explains the geometric and numerological organization of *Sobre os rios*, following the lead of Vasco Graça Moura's research into this topic. Finally, in the seventh chapter, "Palinode," Fleming recalls several authors whose work can be interpreted as palinode, and proposes that Camões understands poetry as an ascetically oriented act of will.

Along the path of Fleming's critical analysis, a series of connections are established with a vast array of authors ranging from Classical Antiquity to near Camões's contemporaneity. These connections may be thematic, symbolic, numerological or textual. The result is a rich survey that gathers many of Europe's major writers and cultural as well as literary texts, particularly from the medieval

period. Here Fleming's scholarly expertise on Geoffrey Chaucer (he published *Classical Imitation and Interpretation in Chaucer's Troilus* in 1990), on the *Ecloga Theoduli* ("Muses of the Monastery," 2003), medieval exegesis (*From Bonaventure to Bellini: An Essay in Franciscan Exegesis*, 1982), Joachim of Fiore (*Two Poems Attributed to Joachim of Fiore*, 1978) even on the *Roman de la Rose* (*The Roman de la Rose: A Study in Allegory and Iconography*, 1969), and on Boethius, becomes evident. In fact, the critic suggests precisely that future Camoenian scholarship should pay closer attention to Boethius's impact on his poetic production.

In the beginning of his study, Fleming refers to his "erratic" critical method, understood in the ancient Latin sense of "digression and divagation" (vii). His adoption of this method provides some of the essay's most appealing pages. The practice the author calls "wandering" reveals itself as particularly appropriate to study a poem that embodies a complex literary tradition, a tradition which becomes, at the same time, one of the poem's subjects. Thus, links are established and presented through sequences that continually provoke the reader's interest. Furthermore, this "wandering" practice cuts across different English translations of *Sobre os rios*, progressing through other poems by Camões. In his frequent discussions of these other poetic texts by Camões, Fleming delves deeply into their meanings.

In the context of Camoenian criticism, this essay distinguishes itself for not succumbing to a biographical approach. Indeed, in the past, *Sobre os rios* has been the object of rather imaginative biographical interpretations. Nevertheless, to focus on the moral tension underlining the evolution from sin to redemption also reveals some trust in the order that editors have imposed on Camões's poems in their published collections. In this regard, it becomes suggestive that the last word in his book of sonnets is Christ. In fact, however, it was the editors who chose the sonnet "Verdade, amor, rezão, merecimento," whose last verse reads "mas o melhor de tudo é crer em Cristo," to close the book. In the end, nothing is known about the criteria determining the order of the sonnets, apart from the fact that they stemmed from the editors' choices. Something similar could be said about the position attributed to Boscán's *Conversión* in the sequence of poems in his book. In the 1544 Antwerp edition, the poem appears at the end of the collection of *redondilhas*. Boscán had died two years before and the poem had not been incorporated into previous editions of his poetry.

Boscán's poem *Conversión* deserves special mention among the multiple "sources" suggested for Camões's poem. In effect, Fleming asks, "how is it that literary history has thus far failed to identify the obvious vernacular 'source' of Camões's poetic inspiration in this extraordinary work?" (83). The links between *Sobre os rios* and *Conversión* have already been considered by José Filgueira Valverde, Maria Vitalina Leal de Matos, and Aníbal Pinto de Castro. The latter authored a 2004 article entitled "Boscán e Garcilaso no lirismo português do Renascimento e do Maneirismo," which Fleming lists in his bibliography. Castro supports downplaying the proximity between the two texts, arguing that, unlike *Sobre os rios*, *Conversión* belongs to the late medieval period and lacks

Augustinian Neoplatonic elements. In fact, *Conversión's* conceptual simplicity is clearly evidenced in the poem's personification and dramatization of a set of abstract categories which represent the poetic subject's interior life. This same subject merely observes how his inner life is controlled by "humors" and other categories defined by Albertus Magnus. *Conversión's* oneiric setting is reminiscent of the medieval dream vision. Furthermore, although the topic of mutability is common to both Boscán and Camões, as Fleming asserts, Camões's treatment of the same theme centers much more on an individual problematic. With regard to literary history, it is true that both poets have a lot in common. Fleming thinks that both may be considered as pioneers, although the specific role each plays in this respect requires that we understand them in different terms. The Catalan Juan Boscán and the Portuguese Francisco de Sá de Miranda, both born in the late fifteenth century, were the first Iberian poets to introduce Italian meter, new poetic themes and literary genres. However, Camões, who was born around 1522, improved and refined the imitation of models introduced earlier by these and other Iberian poets. None of these aspects diminishes the significance of Fleming's comparative readings of Boscán, Camões and several other poets.

It is almost certain that Fleming is the first scholar to reference the *Ecloga Theoduli* in the context of Camoenian studies. The author deems it "impossible that Camões had not studied the Eclogue" (81) in the course of his Latin education, although he also concedes that "he may never have read it" (82). In fact, scholars who have studied sixteenth-century Portuguese education do not refer to Theodolus. Indeed, neither scholars from an earlier generation, such as Américo da Costa Ramalho, nor younger scholars, such as Margarida Miranda, mention Theodulus. Nor does *Brill's Encyclopaedia of the Neo-Latin World*. By the time Camões went through his Latin education, *Ecloga Theoduli* had already run its course as a fundamental part of the pedagogical canon.

Several studies have concentrated on the ways in which the poem straddles the interstitial space between the late medieval period and the Renaissance. Certainly, this monograph's main contribution lies in its quest for *Sobre os rios'* medieval precedents, as well as in its examination of the modes in which the poem engages with scriptural exegesis. It is with respect to the latter approach that this study adds great value to Camoenian studies and deserves to be read.

Rita Marnoto
University of Coimbra
rmarnoto@fl.uc.pt