

9. The Poetics of Distance in the Early Modern European Imaginary

Joana Lima

Abstract: Portuguese blue water literature reconceptualized space, while creating the notion of a global world. Astonishingly cartographical, poetry, theater, and prose written in sixteenth-century Portugal trace a fresh consciousness of scientific and technological domain over long-distance navigation, thus, the globe. Wonderous and realistic tales about safely accessing what was remote, by portraying novel vocabulary ways to convey distance and reckoning the effect that faraway events have in local reality, inscribed an emerging and collective mental story in Europe based in the lived experience at sea. A story about having no fear of sailing to the end of the world and then returning, a story of believing that *if there was more world, they would get there*.

Keywords: production of space, planetary distance, oceanic globe, reconceptualization of the *orbis terrarum*, mental cartography, literary archive

Introduction

With a splash of science and a spritz of novelty, the voices coming from the ocean sprayed a refreshing notion of the globe in sixteenth-century Europe: that the world is no longer enough. What had been perceived until then as an *orbis terrarum*, a planet made of Europe, Africa, and Asia, together with absolutely inaccessible areas, is suddenly small enough for a new human aspiration—to travel across it. Blue is the color of this desire, spread on land by Portuguese and Spanish crews returning from oceanic long-distance voyages around the Earth. The sound of the seven seas—that is, the conversations that happened on board, necessarily involving

technical, technological, and scientific concepts —showered Iberian courts with sophisticated notions arising from scientific and technical practices at sea, such as a new perception of planetary distance, which soon started percolating through the public discourse. Subtly, as ocean spume is blown to the sand. To hold these delicate traces of the sea on the shore, to understand this process of knowledge transference from daily life in the ships to the common conversation of non-specialized people on land, to approach what the *vox populi* said about distance when, for the first time, humankind experiences the Earth on a global scale, one must choose tools suited to a story written not in traditional historical documents, but in the imagination of the people who lived it. For a subtle story, subtle historiographical tools.

To enter this elusive realm, sixteenth-century Portuguese literature seems to be key, given how early it starts portraying and recreating life in long-distance oceanic voyages, and how it brims with nautical, cartographical, and astronomical terms; the reflex of a society very familiar with the oceanic enterprise, and which drops wind roses, nautical charts, calculations of latitude, seamanship maneuvers, constellations, and oceanic routes into this corpus and the imaginary of those in contact with it. Forming part of the artifacts that disrupted medieval European metageography¹—the set of narrative structures by which Europeans had hitherto organized their knowledge about the world, such as theater, poetry, cartography or painting—, this blue water literature seems to describe the globe in a cartographically new way, while reconceptualizing planetary space, following the experiential observation of a new geography of the Earth in the context of oceanic voyages. A new world, demanding a far broader stage, is designed by these texts. Their scope is no longer European but planetary, forever changing the cosmological and cartographical notions of what Earth is for their very diverse audiences. However challenging it is to grasp the impact of such a profound existential transformation on the life of an individual (capable of traveling the entire world once transoceanic voyages became stable, routine, and safe), it is possible to trace this process through a close comparative reading of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Portuguese poetry, theater, and chronicles about territory and voyages.

1 On the concept of *metageography*, developed by Edmundo O'Gorman and Ricardo Padrón, see Ricardo Padrón, *The Spacious Word: Cartography, Literature, and Empire in Early Modern Spain* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

9.1. A New Gaze, from the Heavens to the Waters

A starting point for a brief itinerary through this cosmological and existential transformation based on the perception of distance may be a late fifteenth-century courtier poem, “De Duarte de Brito em que conta o que a ele e a outro lh’aconteceo com ãu roussinol e mutas coisas que vio” (“By Duarte de Brito in which he tells what happened to him and a friend with a nightingale and many things that he saw”), compiled by the Portuguese poet, chronicler and editor Garcia de Resende (1470–1536) in the poetic anthology *Cancioneiro Geral* (1516):

Through amazing paths,
we crossed so many deserts
that we fearfully found ourselves
doubtful of our lives
and certain of our deaths.
Sad and faraway,
due to the long-distance
of very strange lands,
we found ourselves divested of us,
and tired in the high lands
and mountains.²

This poem³ is deeply inspired by the *Inferno* (ca. 1304) of the *Divine Comedy*⁴ by Dante Alighieri (1265–1321), via *El Infierno de los Enamorados*,⁵ by Íñigo López de Mendoza, the marquis of Santillana (1398–1458). In this tale of two friends traveling by foot across mountains and valleys, losing their way in remote lands and even in Hell, we are at the ground zero of the spatial revolution—the poem bears the stamp of the medieval itinerary and its gaze

2 Original text: “Per caminhos espantosos / passámos tantos desertos / que nos vimos temerosos / ser das vidas dovidosos / e de nossas mortes certos. / Onde tristes, alongados, / per longa estancia de terras / mui estranhas, / nos vimos de nós roubados, / cansados nas altas serras / e montanhas.” See Garcia de Resende, “De Duarte de Brito em que conta o que a ele e a outro lh’aconteceo com ãu roussinol e mutas coisas que vio,” *Cancioneiro Geral de Garcia de Resende* (Maia: Imprensa Nacional-Casa da Moeda, 1990), 1:316.

3 I have translated all literary sources presented in this paper, originally published in Portuguese, given that the great majority of them have not yet been translated into English.

4 Dante Alighieri, *A Divina Comédia*, trad. Vasco Graça Moura. Edição bilingue (Lisboa: Bertrand Editora, 2006).

5 Marqués de Santillana, Íñigo López de Mendoza. *Obras completas* (Madrid: Fundación José Antonio de Castro, 2002).

on the world, the universe, and distance. Long-distance is presented as a synonym for the fear of death, for self-doubt, sadness, remoteness, loneliness, tiredness, and even depersonalization: the typical emotions of one living in an *orbis terrarum*, closed in upon itself and forbidding travel to the end of the world. Given the feelings of uneasiness caused by being in remote places (linked closely with a lack of technical and scientific control over nature), Duarte de Brito constructs a great part of the itinerary in this poem looking away from the Earth, placing his gaze on the heavens, its celestial bodies and constellations. As in other parts of the poem, which will not be quoted here given their length, the movement of the sun, Mercury, Venus, the moon, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn, as well as the twelve constellations of the Zodiac seem to be much more familiar to the poet than traveling across the globe, making him look up to the stars, and placing him in a powerless position on Earth.

The world depicted here is that of the Aristotelian-Ptolemaic-Christian cosmological model, according to which the universe had a beginning and would have an end. De Brito's world, drawn from *On the Heavens*⁶ by Aristotle, follows a representation of the universe made of two concentric zones—first, the celestial zone, which contained the orbits of the Empyrean, the first motor, the crystalline, the firmament, and the seven planets; then, the sublunar zone, made of corruption, which contained the four elements of matter (fire, air, water, and earth, in that order), and was therefore divided into four concentric zones (the last being the infernal, with the heavier mass of matter; that is, the Earth). De Brito's world is thus one in which the Earth is the lowest place in an absolutely finite universe, where all living bodies are destined to perish, and must content themselves with gazing at the stars.

Oddly enough, the observation of this dark stellar canopy, when applied to oceanic sailing—that is, the astronomical navigation that allowed for early modern Iberian long-distance voyages—seems to have been the twist that allowed for humankind to move from the sense of a finite universe to an infinite one, and to start feeling more at home in the world. It is possible to grasp the exact moment of awe (with all the dread and wonder it encompassed), when human pupils dilated at the same time global space did, in “Como elrey dō Mannuel depois que Pedrálvarez Cabrál veo da India por razam deste descobrimento & cõquista della, tomou o titulo que óra tem a coróa deste reyno de Portugal, & a razam & causas delle” (“How King Manuel I after Pedro Álvares Cabral came back from Brazil due to its discovery & conquest, took the title that now has the crown of this kingdom of Portugal, & the reason & causes of it”), a passage of *Décadas da*

6 Aristotle, *On the Heavens*, Loeb Classical Library (London: Heinemann, 1939).

Ásia I ("Decades of Asia" I) (1552). In this passage, the Portuguese chronicler João de Barros (1496–1570), working at Casa da Índia⁷ in sixteenth-century Lisbon, describes the reaction of the advisors of King Manuel I of Portugal (1469–1521) to a nautical chart created after the oceanic voyage that led to the finding of Brazil (1500) by the Portuguese navigator Pedro Álvares Cabral (ca. 1450–ca. 1520):

And in their minds, which saw only in the nautical chart such a large coast of painted land, and so many directions, that it seemed that our ships circled the known world twice, by entering the path of another world we wanted to discover, such a disquieting image began being painted that their judgment became haunted. And if this painting created reluctance at sight [...], how would a prudent man not lament in his regard, seeing that this kingdom [...] carried on its shoulders the obligation of a world, not painted, but true, which could bend him with the great weight of the earth, the sea, the wind, the burning sun it contained, and, what is more serious and burdensome than these elements, the variety of so many people who inhabited it.⁸

As they absorbed the lines and hues of this map of a New World in the South Atlantic, a globe double the size that advisors (and ancient scholars, basing

7 The Casa da Índia, founded in Lisbon circa 1503 by King Manuel I of Portugal under the designation Casa da Guiné, da Mina e da Índia, is the most important economic Portuguese institution in the sixteenth century. It was there that all the commercial, administrative, and financial aspects of the Portuguese maritime expansion were managed, as it served both as customs, trading post, accounting office, post office, and central archive of the voyages, were the Padrão Real map was created, updated, kept, and from which all the official Portuguese nautical charts were copied. For more detailed information on the Casa da Índia, see *Regimento das Casas das Índias e Mina* (Coimbra: ed. Damião Peres, 1948); Avelino Teixeira da Mota, *Alguns aspectos da colonização e do comércio marítimo dos portugueses na África Ocidental nos séculos XV e XVI* (Lisboa: Junta de Investigações Científicas do Ultramar, 1976); and Luís de Albuquerque, *Dicionário de história dos descobrimentos portugueses* (Lisboa: Círculo de Leitores, 1994), 1:517–520.

8 Original text: "E ajnda a muytos, vendo sómete na cártá de mareár hua tâ grãde cósta de térra pintada, & tâtas vóltas de rumos, q parecia rodeárem as nossas náos duas vezes o mundo sabido, por entrar no caminho doutro nóvo q queríamos descobrir: fazia nelles esta pintura hua tâ espátósa jimaginaçã, q lhe assombráva o juízo. E se esta pintura fazia nojo à vista [...], como se nã cõdoeria hum prudente homem prudente em sua consideração, ver este reino [...] tomar sobre os hõbros de sua obrigação hum mundo, nã pintádo, mas verdadeiro, q ás vezes o podia fazer acurvar cõ o grã peso da terra, do már, do vento, & ardor do sól q em sy continha: & o q éra muyto mais grãve & pesádo q estes elementos, a variédade de tantas gentes como nelle habitávã." See João de Barros, *Décadas da Ásia* (Lisboa: Imprensa Nacional-Casa da Moeda, 1992), Década I, Livro VI, Cap. 1. Fl. 68.

themselves upon Ptolemy) had imagined, took shape in their astonished minds. Their bewilderment must have been rooted in at least two major consequences of the voyage. First, the fact that the maritime voyage would shatter Ptolemaic geography (the dominant paradigm for centuries), having transcended the zones hitherto considered unreachable or uninhabited. And second, the ontological transformation that this cartographically materialized geographical discovery was about to bring. When reading this excerpt, one cannot escape the immediacy and keenness of their feeling that this nautical chart would put the weight of the world on the shoulders of the Portuguese court, all the way from Brazil. The gravity of a newfound awareness—that a profound transformation of planetary space was about to reshape the sense of self in the world—did not diminish over time. Paradoxically, this change brought a greater sense of ease with it, making those who felt it feel slightly less like they were at the very bottom of the universe.

Suddenly blue, the early sixteenth-century literary gaze descended from the night sky to the glistening ocean waters and then to the Earth. This shift was accompanied by a profound and enduring change of feelings about long-distance—a shift to embracing it, longing for it, and even pursuing it. Disrupting medieval narratives about the globe, these literary texts, inspired by written and oral descriptions of a New World, depict a continuous movement of characters across the globe in an astonishing spatial extension that was unimaginable before the Iberian transoceanic voyages. The naturalness, recurrence, stability, and security with which many literary characters, imitating real-life travelers from all Portuguese social strata, cross the oceans and the globe may have something to say about how space, long-distance, and the notion of a global world began to be perceived in early modern Iberia. Numerous references to voyages on a planetary scale are found, for instance, in Portuguese popular theater. One such example is found in a short paragraph of the *Comédia Eufrosina* (“Eufrosina Comedy”) (1555), by Portuguese playwright, courtier, and royal treasurer Jorge Ferreira de Vasconcelos (1515–1585). In this scene, a character called Zelótipo, a Portuguese nobleman living in Coimbra who plans to go to India, reads a letter by a character called Troilos de Sousa, a Portuguese resident of India. The missive, read aloud to his family in provincial Coimbra, gives news about the voyages of a certain Galaor Falcão, a Portuguese man traveling through Asia. The communication, quoted in translation below, displays the geographical extension of movement around the globe that Portuguese theater audiences, not particularly learned, were surprisingly familiar with:

Zelótipo—You shall tell to the lady who is my aunt Briolanja Soarez that her son Galaor Falcão made a trip to the islands of the Maldives where he was at great risk, but he left and went to recover in Ormuz, where he wrote to me that he is healthy. And to my lady Violante D'Ornela, the godmother of my child, say that her husband left from here (in India) to China, and that he wrote to me from Malacca saying that he had taken a profit with certain goods, and that he was following his route with determination to be here at the time of the armada leaving for those kingdoms (of Portugal), to go with the job I brought, and I think that he will arrive very rich.⁹

From Goa to the Maldives and then Ormuz, from India to China, Malacca and Portugal—a literary itinerary of places simultaneously so *exotic* and yet familiar to the commoner of sixteenth-century Portugal. The oceanic voyages mentioned by Ferreira de Vasconcelos cover massive swaths of land and sea space. This unprecedented expansion in the imagination of the Earth should have been astonishing to a public that, just half a century prior, had read De Brito's uneasiness about traveling through far-away places. This being a play presented before a community, however, it had to resonate instantly with the audience's imaginary, given the immediacy intrinsic to theater. The swiftness with which these characters traverse the globe and communicate through the written word with loved ones back home, and the ease with which this information is given in the *Comédia Eufrosina*, are therefore telling. They suggest that mid-sixteenth-century Portuguese audiences were already accustomed to the concept of long-distance traveling, the interconnection between faraway places, and thus a global world, connected by the oceans. A very understandable consequence of this is the formation of a society in which all social strata were somehow involved in the maritime expansion in some capacity. Hence Zelótipo's casual tone as he delivers an itinerary of the exotic just as if it were an itinerary of his small hometown.

What we find in the *Comédia Eufrosina*, a Renaissance play inspired by the classical structure and usual amorous subject of Roman comedies, runs contrary to the paradigm that had ruled antiquity and the Middle Ages, when

9 Original text: "Zelótipo—Direis à senhora minha tia Briolanja Soarez que seu filho Galaor Falcão fez ãa viagem às ilhas de Maldiva onde correu grande risco, porém fez fazenda e foi-se convalecer a Ormuz, donde me escreveu que está de saúde. E à senhora minha comadre Violante D'Ornela disse que seu marido partiu daqui pera a China, e de Malaca me escreveu que fezera proveito em certa mercadoria, e levava sua rota com determinação de ser aqui ao tempo da armada pera esses reinos, pera se ir com o emprego que trouxesse, e tenho pera mim que irá muito rico." See Jorge Ferreira de Vasconcelos, *Comédia Eufrosina* (Lisboa: Edições Colibri, 1998), 37.

the Earth was considered to be divided into parts, or zones, many of them unreachable. In this hybrid literary object, the traditional dramatic subject and narrative structure is revitalized by topics related to the maritime expansion, like that of characters moving at great speed and over immense distances across the globe. Here, we find a testament to a moment of transition between a classical and a modern world, with previously remote locales—such as the Maldives, Ormuz, India, China, Malacca—transformed into familiar places, if only in name. Briolanja Soares and Violante D'Ornela, noblewomen living in Coimbra who would certainly have traveled very little, nonetheless readily recognize the toponyms Zelótipo lists. This shift was enabled by the science, technology, and techniques at the basis of oceanic navigation.

It is possible to find this idea even earlier in Portuguese literature, together with the notion of nautical security and stability, which must have provided sixteenth-century people with a sense of optimism and trust in these voyages. Gil Vicente (ca. 1465–ca. 1536), the forefather of Portuguese theater, had been absorbing such concepts since the beginning of the sixteenth century. He often enjoyed the patronage of King Manuel I of Portugal, the same monarch whose advisors had been awestruck by their encounter with a world twice its previous size while gazing at Pedro Álvares Cabral's nautical chart. Immersed in the Portuguese court, Vicente's works are naturally tinged by the maritime themes imbuing the reign of Manuel I, inspiring a fair number of literary studies on topics like the aquatic imagery in his plays. What is lacking is a deeper appreciation of the subtle and sophisticated scientific notions coming from the maritime enterprise and materializing in his words, which mirror the knowledge effortlessly learned by Portuguese theater audiences in everyday life. Such an expression of confidence in science can be met in the tragicomedy *Triunfo do Inverno* ("Triumph of Winter," 1529), an allegorical tale about the celebration of Spring, where the author characterizes the difficulty of winter by using the image of a storm in the ocean:

The (Portuguese) ships are so powerful
with the grace of the heavens
that, although the sky may sink
with dangerous storms,
they go and they return without fear.¹⁰

10 Original text: "Son sus naves tan poderosas / Con la gracia de lo cielo / Que aunque se hunda el cielo / Com tormentas peligrosas / Van y vienen sin recelo." See Gil Vicente, *Triunfo do Inverno* (Lisboa: Imprensa Nacional, 1933), 19.

In shipbuilding and technology, they (the Portuguese) trusted. This, nautical astronomy, seafaring techniques, and cartography simultaneously allowed for a real broadening of the planetary space and the possibility of shortening it, rendering accessible what was previously remote and frightening, and installing human dominion over the ocean. That is, notions inconceivable only a century before. Nor were these voyages adventures: they were carefully prepared round trips, in which safety was to be achieved by the systematic training of pilots; the establishment of Portuguese administrative institutions such as the Casa da Índia (which logistically and scientifically organized these expeditions); and the creation of scientific documents such as regiments, oceanic rutters, nautical charts, and seamanship handbooks, to develop steady and stable oceanic routes like the India Run and the Brazil Run.¹¹ The complex logistical and informational system that early modern Portugal inaugurated, which allowed for the success of oceanic voyages and long-distance control of the ultramarine empire, has received comparatively little attention from historians of science (in contrast to the more comprehensive body of scholarship on the Spanish Empire).¹² These same factors made it common knowledge (even to the unlearned audiences of Gil Vicente's plays) that Portuguese ships facing bad weather in the middle of the ocean were equipped with scientific and cartographical knowledge, nautical instruments, and naval construction. Round trips could be completed—refreshingly—*without fear*.

Along with this reliance on scientific and technological control of nature came new notions of globality regarding the influence of distant phenomena on local decision-making (in order to accomplish a successful voyage). This was the case for example of the need for Portuguese pilots to master the wind cycle systems in both the Atlantic and the Indian Oceans throughout the year (both were crucial for the completion of a safe round trip between Portugal and India). To know the cycle of the Indian Ocean monsoons was to know how to decide the date on which the Portuguese ships should depart from Lisbon to India, and vice versa. Such an important decision implied understanding that remote global

11 On the early modern Portuguese institutions and practices for the organization and development of the knowledge involved in long-distance traveling, see Antonio Sánchez, "Science by *regimento*: Standardising Long-Distance Control and New Spaces of Knowledge in Early Modern Portuguese Cosmography," *Early Science and Medicine* 21, no. 2–3 (2016): 133–155, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15733823-02123p03>.

12 On this subject, see Arndt Brendecke, *Imperio e información. Funciones del saber en el dominio colonial español* (Madrid: Iberoamericana; Frankfurt: Vervuert, 2016).

events had major influences on nearby local actions, given that the date chosen to depart from Lisbon to India, usually between March and April, depended on the sailing conditions on both oceans: at this time of the year, the winds were favorable for sailing south in the Atlantic, and to arrive in time, between June and September, for the great southwest monsoon in the Indian Ocean that facilitated navigation to India. Likewise, from India to Lisbon, the return was usually between December and March (often in January), so that Portuguese ships might catch the northeast monsoon. Even though this was the pilot's decision, the knowledge derived from these nautical practices circulated more widely.

The comedy *Auto da Índia* ("The Play of India") (1509), by Gil Vicente, is a perfect example of how the consequences of remote events were inscribed in the early modern Portuguese imaginary, specifically the importance of knowing the wind circulation cycles in the oceans. A satire on the adultery perpetrated by married women living in Lisbon whose husbands had traveled to India, this play encapsulates in its two main characters—Constança, the adulterous wife waiting for her husband to return from Calicut; and Moça, her maid, a ferocious critic of Constança's infidelity—the common knowledge unlearned people, without any experience in sailing, had about these transoceanic voyages. The continuous question, always coming up in its dialogues and monologues, is the date when the deceived husband will return to Lisbon, since Constança does not have a friend in India like Troilos de Sousa from *Comédia Eufrosina*, communicating her husband's whereabouts. *Auto da Índia* is rich in references to the time and space of the India Run. Knowledge about the usual departure date from Lisbon (due to the Indian Ocean monsoons), as well as the acquaintance with the wind system in the Atlantic Ocean, shine brightly in the lexicon of the sea with which this play was written. Clearly, both courtier and unlearned audiences in Lisbon were quite aware of these natural phenomena and their consequences. For Constança to safely continue her extramarital affair without being caught by her husband, it is important that the date on which he departed to Calicut is known:

They depart from here (Lisbon) in May
When young blood starts stirring.¹³

13 Original text: "Partem em Maio daqui / Quando o sangue novo atíça." See Gil Vicente, *Auto da Índia* (Lisboa: Seara Nova, 1979), 27.

A bad omen for those sailing in the Atlantic Ocean, this metaphor about blood gives rise to the idea that the hot season begins in May, perhaps hinting at inauspicious timing for a departure to India. This awareness of the importance of meteorology for the voyage to India was related to the conditions for crossing the Cape of Good Hope, always difficult due to the strong oceanic currents contrary to the passage to the Indian Ocean and the storms that typically occur there in July, winter in the southern hemisphere. It was also associated with the route to be chosen after doubling the cape, since the date of the crossing determined the path to be followed to reach India—either sailing north, by the Island of Mozambique, where the ships could stop over before reaching Goa, Calicut, or Cochin; or sailing northeast, in open sea, through the central Indian Ocean up to India. These two route options, a consequence of the time the ships had departed from Lisbon, would necessarily imply two different types of voyage in terms of safety, possibility of hazards, and of course arrival dates at the destination. Therefore, given the weight this timing had for the human lives on board and the economic success of the kingdom, it was understandable that the audiences watching this play were familiar with such considerations. A less than perfect date (i.e., leaving May in a rush) was not unheard of,¹⁴ and may be linked to financial issues, which could lead to disastrous consequences on a voyage like the one Constança's husband was undertaking. Among other undesirable outcomes, the ship risked getting lost along the African coast, wintering in Brazil, being wrecked at the Cape of Good Hope, or having to spend a tremendous amount of time in the Indian Ocean on the way to India, thus missing the due return date to Lisbon. In Constança's view, of course, some of these exigencies would have been welcome, giving her more time to pursue her amorous affairs in Lisbon.

Despite her confidence in the delay of her husband's return to Portugal due to his late departure date from Lisbon, he does return on time. Science, technology, and technique, bypassing the obstacles of the natural world,

14 On the departure dates from Portugal to India, see Charles Boxer, *The Tragic History of the Sea 1589–1622* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959), 7: “Most seamen thought that the first half of March was about the best time to set out on the voyage to India, but in practice the ships often left in the second half of March or in the first half of April. Departures later in April, or even early in May, were not unknown, but the ships involved almost invariably made *arribadas*, or abortive voyages, being compelled either to return to Lisbon or to ‘winter’ in Brazil. Delayed departures were chiefly due to administrative and financial difficulties at Lisbon, such as shortage of ready money when most needed, and trouble in collecting the crew.”

swiftly and safely brought him back home, even before the anticipated time of arrival, thus completing a secure round trip of the India Run:

We returned in the *volta do mar*,
Almost, almost capsizing,
Our Heron was flying
As the sea was falling apart.¹⁵

The speed of sailing back to Lisbon (despite meeting a tremendous storm in the Atlantic Ocean, as the hyperbole of the sea “falling apart” suggests), reaches this *auto*’s audiences through the animation of the heron. Unexpectedly, in a time where Renaissance European literature was turning to classical antiquity for its models, lexicon, and tone, we find in Gil Vicente a taste for rhetorically playing with technology, using an elegant and fast bird (the heron) to stand in for a technological object (a Portuguese ship). This vessel does not sail, it metaphorically flies over the ocean, ploughing through its hindrances—the currents, the winds, the waves, the atmospheric phenomena—to such a point that the boat almost capsizes. The passage likewise encapsulates how knowledge of the winds could shorten great distances at sea in its use of the expression (evidently known by the audience, given the normalcy with which it is said) *volta do mar*.¹⁶ This was a nautical maneuver invented by Portuguese sailors when faced with the difficulty of sailing north near the African coast in the southern Atlantic Ocean, on their way to Lisbon. Rather than struggle against winds pushing the ship south (a feature of this part of the ocean), this sailing technique consisted of following an odd new route. Returning from India, after the crossing of the Cape of Good Hope, the pilots would steer northwest into the open Atlantic Ocean, leading the ships to the island of Saint Helena, and, after sighting the Saint Peter and Saint Paul archipelago, they continued until they reached the latitude of the Azores archipelago. From there, they could take an easy and almost straight route east from the Azores to Lisbon. A similar maneuver could be made when returning to Lisbon from the Gulf of Guinea.

15 Original text: “Fomos na volta do mar / Quasi quasi a quartelar / A nossa Garça voava / Que o mar se despedaçava.” See Vicente, *Auto da Índia*, 53.

16 On this sailing maneuver, also known as the *volta do Brasil*, *volta do mar largo*, *volta do largo*, *volta da Guiné* or *volta da Mina*, and its relation to the Atlantic and Indian ocean wind systems throughout the year, according to fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Portuguese oceanic rutters, see José Malhão Pereira, “Roteiros portugueses, séculos XVI a XVIII. Sua gênese e influência no estudo da hidrografia, da meteorologia e do magnetismo terrestre” (PhD diss., University of Lisbon, 2018).

If it were not for the nautical expertise of the pilot in this play, Constança's husband and his fellow crew members would not have been able to experience the velocity and success of the return voyage here portrayed. Despite the literary transfiguration present in the excerpt above, this is an image that was quite close to reality, since knowing the wind was decisive in safely and quickly sailing the Atlantic and following an established maritime route, the *volta do mar*. Not only are there numerous references to winds from different parts of the globe across sixteenth-century Portuguese literature, but there is also a solid awareness of distances between places and distances at sea, which is accompanied by a new lexicon of accuracy. This vocabulary reflects a fresh idea of numerical control over nature, where readers and theater audiences are given specific units of length, such as nautical leagues, and numbers, to represent the distance at which something is. In the same *Auto da Índia*, Moça, the maid, speaking ironically to Constança, states that:

If when he (your husband) goes out to fish
 Half a league into the sea,
 You know very well where he is,
 Much more do you know when he goes to Calicut.¹⁷

Again employing hyperbole, here for the sake of comedy, Gil Vicente creates a situation in which this unlearned adulterous woman is more aware of the nautical distances on the India Run than of those linked to a simple local fishing trip off the Portuguese coast. Constança understandably knows the distances “very well” to locate someone in her reality close-by, where she can possibly even see the fishing boat. However, despite having never left mainland Portugal, she knows how to do this much better when the reality is faraway, where her vision cannot help her; that is, in the blue oceanic desert, where only animals, the colors of the water, and the stars—and, of course, documents such as nautical rutters, where this information was compiled and organized—might help one find a location. Notwithstanding the hyperbole and the irony, it is not farfetched to believe that a mental cartography of these distances and locations had been very naturally inscribed in the society laughing at this Gil Vicente satire.

In fact, a sense of control over the globe, turned into an apprehensible object through the lived experience at sea and consequent narratives of this experience, seems to exist in mid-sixteenth century Portugal. Literature

17 Original text: “I se vai ele a pescar / Mea légua pelo mar / Isto bem o sabes tu / Quanto mais a Calecu.” See Vicente, *Auto da Índia*, 27.

provides us with several accounts of unlearned characters, and, subsequently, audiences, who have the distinct notion of global space and the distance between faraway places. Pedagogical texts such as the chronicle “Em que se descreve o Reyno de Sião, & alguas cousas notaveis nelle” (“Where the Kingdom of Siam is described & some remarkable things in it”) (1563), by João de Barros, add to this sense of holding the globe in the palm of one’s hand, since the author urges the reader to use his fingers to mentally measure the kingdom of Siam while learning Asian geography:

Whoever wants to receive in their mind the land of these kingdoms, turn the left hand with the palm down, and move your thumb away from the second finger, called index, and then move this one away from the next three, which you should close, and shorten it by the first knot, which is situated almost at the half of the finger, where they slightly shorten and extend. And once you have your hand like this, look at the coast of India which is situated along the outside of your thumb, and know that this is the part of the West; and at the end of it you will find Cape Comorin, which has the latitude of seven and a half degrees to the Arctic Pole. And, at the tip of the second finger of the index, which is to the East, before reaching the end of it, which is four degrees latitude to the same part, you will find the city of Malacca, which is situated at two degrees latitude.¹⁸

A brief excerpt of an extended geographical description of the Asian territory, where no figurative map is displayed, this appears to be an innovative textual way of conveying distance and of teaching the geography of remote lands to readers who probably have not yet traveled to such places. Inviting the reader to open their hand and use their fingers, this seems to be a sort of imaginary mapping, making it easy for anyone without cartographical documents but with good imagination to “receive in their mind the land of these kingdoms.” That is, to recreate their own image of the continent, under the guidance of accurate geographical information, such as latitude

18 Original text: “Quem na mente quiser receber a terra deste reyno, vire a mão esquerda com a palma pera baixo, & aparte o dedo polegar do segundo chamado index ou mostrador, & depois aparte este index dos três seguintes, os quâes çerre & encurte pelo primeiro nó que é quásy o meyo per onde eles levemente se encurtam & estendem. E depois que tiver assi a mão, oulhe que a cósta da India lhe fica ao longo do dedo polegar da banda de fóra, e esta é a parte do ponente: & na ponta delle é o cabo Comorij que está em altura do polo artico sete grãos & meyo. E na ponta do segundo dedo index que está ao levante, ante de chegar ao fim delle que está em três quartos de grão da mesma parte: fica em dous a cidadé de Maláca.” See João de Barros, *Décadas da Ásia*, Década III, Livro II, Cap. V, fol. 36.

degrees, holding all the territory between West India and Malacca in the palm of their hand. From looking up to the stars while in foreign valleys and mountains, to looking at the sea and being able to imagine the locations on the Indian Run, to reading a book at home and using a hand to know the entire geography of Asia—from the mid-fifteenth century to the mid-sixteenth century, Portugal came a long way in unintentionally reconceptualizing planetary space.

All the narrative mechanisms presented here appear to have contributed to the dissemination of a notion of global Earth in the Portuguese imaginary, connected by the oceans. A new narrative in which the characters and the people are no longer afraid of going to the end of the world, as there is no end, and they trust in their safe return home due to the organizational, scientific, and technological aspects of the round-trip nature of oceanic voyages. This is a conceptualization quite different from that of the Middle Ages. It brims with optimism and confidence in science and technology, forming a story where the protagonists, despite maintaining the Aristotelian cosmological model as their paradigm, no longer seem to feel they are at the lowest point in the universe. On the contrary, this is a story of feeling more at home in the world, a globe they can grasp in their minds and their fingers, and a story of feeling that the whole Earth is not enough. This desire for venturing into the blue while already knowing all there is in this sub-lunar sphere can be read in *Comédia Eufrosina*, when the character Andrade, a servant of the melancholic and contemplative Zelótipo dreaming of going to India and returning a rich man, states:

Andrade—Look at my master's thoughts:
(he says that) the world is too small for him.¹⁹

A profound existential revolution is encapsulated in Zelótipo's worldview, which is hungry for the infinite, as the great spatial extension from Coimbra to India has been shortened in his imagination. The famous transoceanic voyage (and unexpected first circumnavigation of the globe) of the Portuguese navigator Ferdinand of Magellan (1480–1521), serving the Spanish crown, is very rarely mentioned in contemporary Portuguese literature, possibly due to the anti-Magellan feeling across the kingdom. This is a world in which the awe triggered by the nautical chart produced in the wake of Pedro Álvares Cabral's voyage to Brazil no longer exists. This is a planet

19 Original text: "Andrade—[...] Ver os pensamentos de meu amo: que o mundo é pouco par' ele." See Vasconcelos, *Comédia Eufrosina*, 57.

where it is not merely the known world—Europe, Africa, Asia—that seems to have been rounded twice, like in 1500. It is one where a brand New World has been fully circled, inspiring the famous verse (capturing this new sense of distances) from *Os Lusíadas* (“The Lusiads”) (1572), the epic poem by Luís Vaz de Camões (ca. 1524–ca. 1580): “Was there to be more world, and they (the Portuguese) would get there.”²⁰

While these two sentences seem to be the zenith of a new feeling about long-distance travel and control over the globe, in order to fully appreciate the profound existential transformation Europeans underwent in less than a century, one must read the celebrated allegorical episode of the *Máquina do Mundo* (“Machine of the World”) (*Os Lusíadas*, Chant X), where navigator Vasco da Gama (1469–1524), whom Camões turned into the collective heroic symbol of the Portuguese people, is crowned in glory by Tethys, the most important maritime nymph, for his nautical achievement of finding and establishing a maritime route from Portugal to India:

Uniform, perfect, and self-poised it be,
like the Archetype who designed it.
Astonished with desire as he was
when he saw this globe, Gama stood there.
Thus, the Goddess told him: “Here is the Epitome
of the World, reduced, that here I give
to those eyes of yours, so shall you see
where will you go and shall go, and what you desire.

Here you see the grand machine of the World,
ethereal and elemental, which was made
by the high and profound Intelligence
that has no beginning and no end.
He who surrounding holds this shapely sphere,
this globe and its smooth surface
is God: but what is God no one understands,
as the human genius does not reach that faraway.²¹

20 Original text: “E, se mais mundo houvera, lá chegara.” See Luís Vaz de Camões, *Os Lusíadas* (Porto: Figueirinhas, 1999), 297.

21 Original text: “Uniforme, perfeito, em si sustido, / Qual, enfim, o Arquetipo que o criou. / Vendo o Gama este globo, comovido / De espanto e de desejo ali ficou. / Diz-lhe a Deusa: – “O transunto, reduzido / Em pequeno volume, aqui te dou / Do Mundo aos olhos teus, pera que vejas / Por onde vás e irás e o que desejas. // Vês aqui a grande máquina do Mundo, / Etérea e elemental, que fabricada / Assi foi do Saber, alto e profundo, / Que é sem princípio e meta

Da Gama's crown of glory is to be given the opportunity to observe from Tethys's palace the machine of the world, a replica of the universe, a sphere designed by God containing the Aristotelian cosmological model, with the heavenly spheres, zones, and elemental Earth. The crown of glory is not only to observe God's creation, as only the deities do, which elevates this ship's captain to a divine realm, but also to provide Vasco da Gama with the possibility of being a master of his decisions concerning where he wants to travel on Earth, using the precious geographical information he is being given.

Conclusion

From looking at the heavenly bodies above, to setting one's eyes on the liquid horizon that maps out the entire globe, to beholding the entire universe from above with a bird's eye view (as in cartography made after the first voyages of circumnavigation, like the *Atlas* [1542] of Battista Agnese [ca. 1500–1564]), Camões's Da Gama is a literary character quite different from those of Duarte de Brito's poem, Jorge Ferreira de Vasconcelos's and Gil Vicente's plays, and João de Barros's chronicles. Almost a century after from the medieval ground zero chosen here to represent feelings and views about space, distance, and the globe, Da Gama represents a new way of looking at the world and long-distance: from above, equipped with the technical, technological, and scientific control over nature that long-distance oceanic voyages brought. A new world, one that humankind could hold in its hand. And a new blue poetics of distance, where the most remote place is also the most desired.

References

Primary Sources

- Alighieri, Dante. *A Divina Comédia. Edição bilingue*. Translated by Vasco Graça Moura. Lisboa: Bertrand Editora, 2006.
- Aristotle. *On the Heavens*. Loeb Classical Library. London: Heinemann, 1939.
- Barros, João de. *Décadas da Ásia*. Lisboa: Imprensa Nacional-Casa da Moeda, 1992.
- Camões, Luís Vaz de. *Os Lusíadas*. Porto: Figueirinhas, 1999.

limitada. / Quem cerca em derredor este rotundo / Globo e sua superfície tão limada, / É Deus: mas o que é Deus, ninguém o entende, / Que a tanto o engenho humano não se estende." See Camões, *Os Lusíadas*, 421.

- Regimento das Casas das Índias e Mina*. Coimbra: ed. Damião Peres, 1948.
- Resende, Garcia de. *Cancioneiro Geral de Garcia de Resende*, vol. 1. Maia: Imprensa Nacional-Casa da Moeda, 1990.
- Santillana, Marqués de, Íñigo López de Mendoza. *Obras completas*. Madrid: Fundación José Antonio de Castro, 2002.
- Vasconcelos, Jorge Ferreira de. *Comédia Eufrosina*. Lisboa: Edições Colibri, 1998.
- Vicente, Gil. *Auto da Índia*. Lisboa: Seara Nova, 1979.
- Vicente, Gil. *Triunfo do Inverno*. Lisboa: Imprensa Nacional, 1933.

Secondary Sources

- Albuquerque, Luís de. *Dicionário de história dos descobrimentos portugueses*. Vol. I. Lisboa: Círculo de Leitores, 1994.
- Boxer, Charles. *The Tragic History of the Sea 1589–1622*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959.
- Brendecke, Arndt. *Imperio e información. Funciones del saber en el dominio colonial español*. Madrid: Iberoamericana; Frankfurt: Vervuert, 2016.
- Malhão Pereira, José M. “Roteiros portugueses, séculos XVI a XVIII: Sua gênese e influência no estudo da hidrografia, da meteorologia e do magnetismo terrestre.” PhD diss., University of Lisbon, 2018.
- Padrón, Ricardo. *The Spacious Word: Cartography, Literature, and Empire in Early Modern Spain*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2004.
- Sánchez, Antonio. “Science by *regimento*: Standardising Long-Distance Control and New Spaces of Knowledge in Early Modern Portuguese Cosmography,” *Early Science and Medicine* 21, no. 2–3 (2016): 133–155, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15733823-02123p03>.
- Teixeira da Mota, Avelino. *Alguns aspectos da colonização e do comércio marítimo dos portugueses na África Ocidental nos séculos XV e XVI*. Lisboa: Junta de Investigações Científicas do Ultramar, 1976.

About the Author

Joana Lima has a degree in Classical Languages and Literatures (University of Lisbon, 2006), a Master's degree in Portuguese Literature (NOVA University Lisbon, 2009), a Master's degree in Teaching Portuguese and Classical Languages (NOVA University Lisbon, 2012), and a Diploma of Advanced Doctoral Studies in Portuguese Literature (NOVA University Lisbon, 2010). She dedicated herself to research on Portuguese Culture (University of Lisbon) and Global Studies (Aberta University), and taught Portuguese Culture (Universitas Indonesia), before becoming a member of the Project “RUTTER

– Making the Earth Global: Early Modern Rutters and the Construction of a Global Concept of the Earth” (ERC Advanced Grant 833438; IR: Henrique Leitão, Faculty of Sciences, University of Lisbon), and a PhD candidate in History and the Philosophy of Sciences (University of Lisbon, 2019–. She is completing a doctoral thesis about the spatial reconceptualization of the world as an interconnected globe in the early modern European imaginary, following the sixteenth-century Iberian oceanic voyages that occurred at a planetary scale. In connection with her research, she translated, annotated, and edited the *Relation of the First Journey around the World*, by Antonio Pigafetta (INCM, 2021).



Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>