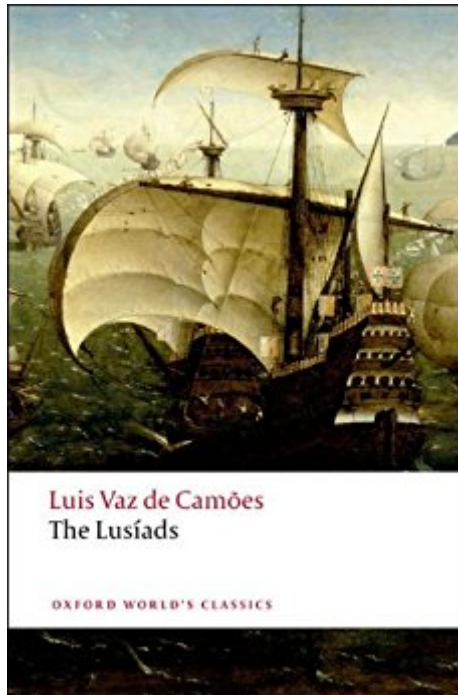


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The Lusiads (Oxford World's Classics)



Synopsis

First published in 1572, *The Lusiads* is one of the greatest epic poems of the Renaissance, immortalizing Portugal's voyages of discovery with an unrivalled freshness of observation. At the centre of *The Lusiads* is Vasco da Gama's pioneer voyage via southern Africa to India in 1497-98. The first European artist to cross the equator, Camoens's narrative reflects the novelty and fascination of that original encounter with Africa, India and the Far East. The poem's twin symbols are the Cross and the Astrolabe, and its celebration of a turning point in mankind's knowledge of the world unites the old map of the heavens with the newly discovered terrain on earth. Yet it speaks powerfully, too, of the precariousness of power, and of the rise and decline of nationhood, threatened not only from without by enemies, but from within by loss of integrity and vision. The first translation of *The Lusiads* for almost half a century, this new edition is complemented by an illuminating introduction and extensive notes.

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Customer Reviews

The Lusiads is Portugal's national epic. It is a poem depicting the voyage of Vasco da Gama around Africa to India in 1497-98. The author, Luis Vaz de Camoes, made similar journeys as a common sailor barely fifty years later, writing The Lusiads as he went. He first published his poem in 1572, but evidently to no great acclaim as Camoes died in poverty a few years later. The Lusiads is not only a national epic, but a very nationalistic one. It manages to recount, in glowing terms, all of Portugal's history from Roman times to Camoes's present (using prophesy to relate what was to come after de Gama's voyages). We learn, for example, that one Portuguese warrior is worth at least a dozen Spaniards. Camoes models his work after Odyssey and the Aeneid. The poet's stated purpose is to show that Portugal is a greater empire than Rome, that da Gama was a greater voyager than Odysseus or Aeneas, and (by inference) that Camoes is at least as great a poet as Homer or Virgil. The work suffers from his excess of ambition, and the author's occasional petulant outbursts (italicized in my edition) about his lack of financial success don't help at all. One of the oddities of the Lusiads is that the classical Roman gods and demigods are major players in what is presented as an epic struggle between Christianity and Islam. Venus is da Gama's special protectoress, while Bacchus sides with the Mohammedans and tries to sabotage the expedition. Camoes thereby makes it all the more obvious that he is donning the mantle of Homer and Virgil. (Nor does he fail to spice up the story with lots of pagan sex.) He is at pains, however, to point out in the poem itself (lest the Inquisition take offense) that he is using the gods of antiquity just as allegories for the forces of nature.

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