

TRAVEL, IMAGINATION, AND THE STRANGEST OF THEATERS:
MENDES PINTO'S *TRAVELS* AND GIL VICENTE'S *BARCA DO INFERNO*

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ABSTRACT: This article focuses William Sherman's statement that travel writing merges eye-witnesses reports, second-hand information and fantasy. Fernão Mendes Pinto's novel *Peregrination* (1583) is compared with Gil Vicente's play *Barca do Inferno*(1517), and it is argued that the fictional/poetic voice simultaneously performs as spectator and imaginary participant.

KEYWORDS: travel writing; information; fantasy; poetic voice.

RESUMO: Este artigo reforça a afirmação de William Sherman de que a literatura de viagens funde testemunhos, informações secundárias e fantasia. O livro *Peregrinação (ou Viagens - 1583)*, de Fernão Mendes Pinto é comparado com a peça *Barca do Inferno (1517)*, de Gil Vicente, argumentando-se que a voz ficcional/poética atua simultaneamente como espectador e participante imaginário.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: literatura de viagens; informações; fantasia; voz ficcional/poética

*O vos omnes, qui transitis per viam,
Attendite, et videte:
Si est dolor sicut dolor meus.
(Lamentations 1:12).*

Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by?
Look and see if there is any sorrow like my sorrow.
(Metzger and Murphy, 1994, p. 1048-49OT)

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In her poem, “Questions of Travel,” the American poet Elizabeth Bishop (1927-79) offers a profound reflection on travel, raising two central questions: “Is it right to be watching strangers in a play / in this strangest of theatres?” and “Is it lack of imagination that makes us come / to imagined places, not just stay at home?” (BISHOP, 2001, p. 93-94). I propose to explore the relationship of the travel experience to the theater, especially the traveler as both spectator and imaginative participant.

My paper will focus on two sixteenth-century Portuguese texts: *Peregrinaçam* (*Peregrination* or *Travels*), by Fernão Mendes Pinto (c. 1510-1583), and the play, *Barca do Inferno*² [The Boat of Hell] (1517), by Gil Vicente (c. 1470-1536). *Peregrination* depicts Mendes Pinto’s far-flung travels and experiences from 1537 to 1558 in Asia, including the Persian Gulf, India, Indochina, Malacca, Sumatra, China, and Japan. On his third voyage to Japan in 1549, Pinto travelled with Francis Xavier.³ Published in 1614, excerpted by Samuel Purchas, and translated into various European languages, Mendes Pinto’s account was one of the best known in the seventeenth century. Chapter 160 of the *Peregrination* describes “The Festival of Xipatilau,” which resembles the Hindu Jagannatha Festival, honoring Vishnu, at the shrine of Puri, Orissa, India. Pinto claims to be an eyewitness to a similar festival not in India but in Burma; in reality, however, he offers an imaginative fiction and a theatrical spectacle. In his travel account, Mendes Pinto juxtaposes an imaginary religious festival and Portugal’s colonial and evangelical enterprise in Asia. Like Vicente’s play *Auto da Barca do Inferno*, “Festival of Xipatilau” breaks the boundaries between fiction and reality; in the process, Mendes Pinto exposes the problematic status of travel writing. Mendes Pinto creates an imagined place and the strangest of theaters, intertwining fantasy and reality, and interior and exterior landscapes.

² The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines “barca” as follows: “The *barca* was thus apparently, originally, a large ship’s boat, used as a lighter; on the Mediterranean, the name continued to be applied to an open boat, even while extended to a small vessel with sails; the latter was the sense with which the word was taken from French into English, and which it still retains both in general and specific use; but in the end of 16th c., the more primitive sense of ‘large rowing boat, barge’ was reintroduced from the languages of the Mediterranean.” In the play, “barca” clearly means “A rowing boat; formerly a large flat boat, a barge” (*OED*), as all who board the barca must also row the boat by means of oars.

³ All quotations from Pinto are from Rebecca D. Catz’s translation of Fernão Mendes Pinto’s *Travels* (1989). I have also consulted the original Portuguese edition of *Peregrinação* (1997). There is a 1653 English translation of *Peregrination* under the title of *The Voyages and Adventures of Fernand Mendez Pinto*, which was reprinted in 1663 and 1692. It should be noted that in *The Voyage and Trauaile* (1588), Cesare Federici traveled to and writes about some of the same areas in Southeast Asia as does Pinto. Of particular interest for our purposes is Federici’s account of Lower Burma and Laos (1588), and William Baffin’s map of the region (Elstracke, 1619).

I.

Jan Borm argues that “the genre *travel book* mixes different forms of writing, while continuously crossing over into other genres” (2004, p. 25). Indeed, *Peregrination* crosses and re-crosses genre boundaries of a travel narrative and of “a tale of a spiritual journey through life, with trials, tribulations, and tests of Christian morality” (Catz, 1991, p. 501). The original title of the 1614 edition, *Peregrination*, suggests “the course of a person's life viewed originally as a temporary sojourn on earth and hence as a spiritual journey, esp. to heaven,” a pilgrimage (*Oxford English Dictionary*). In early usage, the word was chiefly associated “with the period during which the Israelites dwelt in tabernacles in the desert, before entering the promised land,” as for example in Archbishop Edwin Sandys’ 1585 sermon: “The Israelites dwelt in tents, vncertaine of their abode euer readie to shift: whereby they represent vnto vs our peregrination in this mortalitie” (*OED*). *Peregrination* often becomes *Lamentations*. In the *Lamentations* of Jeremiah, the Old Testament prophet depicts the destruction of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans (*OED*). Mendes Pinto focuses on his own life’s tribulations, represented as travels to far-off Asia and eventual return to Portugal and a royal court that refused to reward what he thought were great accomplishments. As in Vicente’s *Barca do Inferno*, Mendes Pinto creates an apocalyptic, allegorical vision, centered on the traveler as both spectator and imaginative participant.

In 16th-century Portuguese, *Auto*, derived from Latin *actus* and *actum*, a thing done, refers to “representação de uma peça teatral” [representation of a stage play], a meaning derived from *agere*, “*pôr em movimento*” [cf. *mise-en-scène*] (*Dicionário Eletrônico Houaiss*).⁴ Gil Vicente composed several of such autos in Portuguese, Castilian, or a mixture of the two languages, such as the farce, *Auto da Índia*, performed in Almada for Queen Lianor in 1509. The play focuses on Constança, an unfaithful wife who out of boredom takes a lover while her husband has sailed with Tristão da Cunha for a two-and-a-half-year expedition to India, starting on Palm Sunday 6

⁴ In *sensu stricto*, the word means “composição alegórica ou satírica em voga no sXV e sXVI, de cunho místico, pedagógico ou moral, que representa e desenvolve os gêneros do teatro medieval europeu” (*Dicionário Eletrônico Houaiss*) [allegorical or satiric composition in vogue in the 15th and 16th centuries, of a mystical, pedagogical or moral nature, which represent or develop the genres of the medieval European theater]. The *Oxford English Dictionary* suggests that *Auto* also carries legal meanings of a public performance or execution of an action required by law, as in *auto-da-fé*.

April, 1506.⁵ *Frágua d'Amor*, a tragicomedy performed at the wedding of King D. João III and Queen Caterina, in 1525, explores the racial, linguistic, and sexual implications of an African's metamorphosis into a white man.⁶ Vicente's plays illustrate a range of genres, including the *Auto da Visitação*—a monologue written to celebrate a royal birthday—farces and satires, tragicomedies, and moralities. The best known and most frequently staged of Vicente's play is the *Auto da Barca do Inferno*, which along with *The Boat to Purgatory* and *The Boat to Heaven* form a trilogy centered on allegorical sea voyages.⁷

Although *Everyman*, the late medieval English morality play, does not present a sea voyage, like *Barca do Inferno*, it depicts life as an allegorical journey. God commands Death to summon Everyman to embark on a long journey of no return, for all creatures must die: “Go thou to Everyman, / And show him, in my name, / A pilgrimage he must on him take, / Which he in no wise may escape” (Abrams and Greenblatt, 2000, p. 447-448). In *Barca do Inferno*, however, there is no summons; instead, the recently deceased passengers from all walks of life approach two boats moored to the docks of a Tagus-like river, getting ready to set sail, one, commanded by the Devil and his crew, bound for the infernal regions; and the other, commanded by an angel, bound for heaven. The Devil enjoins the passengers to embark in a hurry: “À barca, à barca, oulá/ que temos gentil maré!” [All aboard, all aboard / We have a good tide!].⁸ A nobleman, impressed with the richly decorated boat, inquires as to its destination; the Devil responds that it is bound for “a ylha perdida” [Lost/Damned Isle], also known as “o inferno.” The nobleman, unimpressed with such a joyless destination [“terra é bem sim sabor”] and wondering why anyone would choose such a place of inhabitation, seeks another boat bound for paradise [“a barca do parayso”]. He points out to the Angel: “soo fidalgo de solar” [I am lord of a manor].⁹ Other passengers, including Usurer, the Fool Joane, Cobbler, Friar leading his girlfriend by the hand, the bawd Brisida Vaz, the Jew Semifará, Magistrate, Advocate, Enforcado (Hanged Man),

⁵ For a discussion of this and other plays, see Anthony Lappin's translation of Gil Vicente's *Three Discovery Plays: Auto da Barca do Inferno, Exortação da Guee, Auto da India* (1997, p. 114-24). Ronald E. Surtz places Gil Vicente in the larger context of Iberian medieval and Renaissance theater (1979).

⁶ For a discussion of this text and connections to Aaron in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, see Sousa, 2002, p. 105-108. Berardinelli (1971) reprints the text of this auto (1971, p. 341-57).

⁷ Like Milton's *Paradise Lost* later, *Breve sumário da história de Deus*, performed before King John III and Queen Caterina in Almeirim in 1527, surveys and dramatizes biblical history.

⁸ All quotations from *Barca do Inferno* are from Anthony Lappin's edition; however, unless indicated otherwise, all translations are my own.

⁹ Lappin translates the line as “I am of ancient and noble blood,” adopting the figurative meaning of “de solar” [Latin, *per stirpes*]. Portuguese “solar,” literally meaning “manor,” brings the focus back to material possessions, the excessive love of which brings about the fidalgo's damnation.

Four Knights—all board the Boat to Hell, except Joane and the knights. Joane, as the Angel tells him, “did not err through malice” but simplemindedness, which should suffice to earn him admittance to Heaven. The knights, who died on a crusade for Christ, gain automatic admission to Heaven.

The motif of a voyage to the infernal regions has precedents in such works as the 12th-century *Vita Theotonii*, Lucian of Samosata’s *Dialogues of the Dead*, and Johann Geiler’s *Navicula penitentiae* (LAPPIN, 1997, p. 3-4). The third is “the highly popular, moralistic literature which depicted a ship of fools (or sinners) which would carry those embarked upon it to hell, and the ship of penitence, or the Christian life, whose haven would be heaven” (Lappin, 1997, p. 3-4). Other analogous texts include the Spanish *Danza General de la Muerte*, the Book of Revelation, Aeneas’ descent to Hades in Book VI of Virgil’s *Aeneid*, the 15th-century Portuguese ms. *Visão de Tündalo* (Biblioteca Nacional, Lisbon, Codex 226), the *Book of Joseph of Arimathea*, and the *Demanda do Santo Graal*—all depicting a boat crossing to another world (RODRIGUES, 1982, 17-26). In *Barca do Inferno*, the Devil provides the boat with a “banco” (bench), orders appropriate equipment (“palanco”—cord to trim the sails), and instructs the first mate to decorate the boat with festal banners (“Põe bandeiras, que é festa”); although to the Nobleman it first looks like a “cortiço,” a raft used to collect sargasso, or seaweed. The infernal regions receive various appellations, including “Ilha Perdida” (Lost Island or Island of the Damned), “inferno,” “infernal comarca” (infernal jurisdiction), “terra dos demos” (land of demons), “penas infernais” (infernal torments), “lago dos danados” (lake of the damned). The Hanged Man can even serve as a porter at the “portas do Inferno” (Doors of Hell). All passengers become crewmen, for in life they have chosen to serve the devil. The Friar demands that his girlfriend be permitted to travel with him, for his comfort and pleasure. The Fidalgo has made a reservation, as the Devil reminds him: “que este fretastes, / & primeiro que espirastes / me destes logo sinal” (This is the boat you’ve chartered, / & when you first expired / you soon sent me a sign). As I proceed to argue, for Mendes Pinto, the Burmese car festival symbolically functions as a “barca do Inferno,” a vessel used to transport the damned to the infernal regions.

II.

Mendes Pinto departed Lisbon for India on March 11, 1537, and did not return until 1558 to a country quite different from what he had left two decades earlier. King John III had died in 1557. The Crown prince John had also died on January 2, 1554, some three weeks before his only son and heir to the throne, Sebastian, was born. When Pinto returned in 1558, the 4-year-old King Sebastian ruled Portugal and the vast Portuguese empire, through regents. Pinto, who had joined the Society of Jesuits, for a brief period of time, did not receive the rewards he thought he deserved for service rendered to the Portuguese Crown, despite his connection to the Jesuits, whose influence now dominated the royal court. Further, for the rest of his life, while he worked on the composition of his *Peregrination*, he resented the neglect by the royal court, dying an embittered man in 1583.

In fact, Rebecca Catz argues that Pinto satirizes the Portuguese, seeing the death of Sebastian as divine punishment for Portugal's sins (CATZ, 1978, p. 71). For example, she cites contemporary verses as evidence of the anger hurled at the cardinal-king D. Henrique: "Viva el-rei D. Henrique / No Inferno muitos anos, / pois deixou em testamento / Portugal aos castelhanos" (Long live el-rey D. Henrique / Many years in Hell, / For in his testament/ He willed Portugal to the Castilians) (Catz, 1978, p. 45). I do not think that Pinto's allusions to the Portuguese court provide sufficient support for her thesis; rather, Mendes Pinto witnessed the greatest national tragedies his country experienced, and these experiences helped shape the clearly apocalyptic overtones of his narrative.

On August 4, 1578, the young Portuguese King Sebastian (1554-78) was defeated and killed at the Battle of Alcazar, also known as the Battle of the Three Kings, in Morocco. Two years later, Portugal would lose its independence, when Philip II of Spain claimed the vacant Portuguese throne. Engaged in what many perceived as a misguided and poorly-executed crusade against the forces of Islam, Sebastian embodied imperial, religious, and commercial dreams. Widespread interest in his life and tragic end can be gauged from a 1579 English account, titled *A dolorous discourse, of a most terrible boudy battle, fought in Barbarie, the fowrth day of August, last past, 1578*. A contemporaneous British Library MS, Vespasian C.xiii, f. 240a-b, records the Portuguese casualties and adds: "the body of the king of Portingal is at Alcazar" (Sousa, 2008, p. 340n). Sebastian's story is represented in George Peele's *The Battle of*

Alcazar (c. 1585), the anonymous *Famous History of the Life and Death of Captain Thomas Stuckeley* (c. 1596), Philip Massinger's *Believe as You List* (c. 1630, Dryden's *Don Sebastian* (1689), and many other texts (Sousa, 2008, p. 339-63). The events surrounding Sebastian's death and the writings that they inspired were seen in messianic and apocalyptic terms. Many contemporaries of Mendes Pinto believed that Sebastian had not only survived the battle in Morocco but that he would return to save his country.

Apocalyptic literature, a genre of Jewish and Christian literature dating to 250 BCE, presents a dualistic vision of the world. It depicts a battle between the personified powers of evil and corruption—controlled by the Devil, and associated with the present age—and the powers of good—guided by the Messiah, associated with an age to come: “God, however, has set a limit to the era of wickedness and will intervene at the appointed time to execute judgment” (METZGER and MURPHY, 1994, 363 NT). Apocalyptic literature “frequently reflects a negative view of this world and expresses the hope for salvation in new creation or in another life”; therefore, apocalyptic literature often serves to “comfort and encourage the faithful in difficult times” (Metzger and Murphy, 1994, p. 362 NT). Mendes Pinto's narrative, in a fatalistic, dualistic, and apocalyptic tone, depicts the forces of evil that threaten Christianity and the mission of the Jesuits in Asia. It is in this context that I would like to explore Chapter 160 of *Peregrination*.

As Rebecca Catz explains, “the brutish customs” that Mendes Pinto describes in Chapter 160 seem to resemble “the Hindu festival of Juggernaut, our corruption of the Sanskrit word *Jagannatha*, meaning ‘lord of the world,’” “the title under which Vishnu is worshipped at the shrine of Puri in Orissa, on the Bay of Bengal” (CATZ, 1989, p. 608n). Mendes Pinto describes gigantic carts, carrying equally gigantic statues, pulled by thousands, and making a ritualistic journey through the streets.¹⁰ This account has a number of antecedents. In his *Travels* (1330), for example, Friar Odoric suggested that hundreds of pilgrims would sacrifice themselves by throwing themselves under the carts. Others, including Nicolo Conti (1420), Gaspero Babi (1581), and Diogo do Couto (16th century), made similar claims, although later writers suggest that the suicides had decreased (CATZ, 1989, p. 608-609). Mendes Pinto combines information from some of these accounts and hearsay to create his own unique narrative.

¹⁰ There is an illustration of the “Car of Juggernaut” in Vizetelly (London, 1851, *The Illustrated London Reading Book* (London, 1851, p. 9).

It should be noted, however, that Mendes Pinto's description of the Burmese festival differs in some important ways from the actual Jagannatha festivals of India, although carriages drawn by worshippers appear in both religious ceremonies. The three most important of the Indian festivals are the Sandalwood, Bathing of the Gods, and the Car Festival. In the Sandalwood rites, the gods are transported in three palanquins to Narendra Lake; the Bathing Festival occurs when masks of elephants' heads are placed on the sacred figures, according to sacred rites.¹¹ O. M. Starza describes the Car Festival (*Rath Yatra*), which begins near the Eastern Gateway to the great temple:

Here three cars, which take about two months to make, are consecrated with Vedic *mantras* and later the *sudarsana cakra* and the Jagannatha triad are placed in them. The car of Krsna is 45 ft in height and 35 ft square, supported on sixteen wheels 7 ft in diameter and fitted with cloth coverings like the other two (STARZA, 1993, p. 16).

In procession, the three cars transport Jagannatha, his brother Balabhadra, and his sister Subhadra, respectively, through Puri's main street to Gundica, the summer house of Jagannatha, 5 km away (STARZA, 1993, p. 16; PANI, 2005, p. 1-8; MAHALIK, 2008, p. 61-64).

In Chapter 160, Mendes Pinto claims that "The Festival of Xipatilau" took place in Lower Burma, what he terms the Empire of Calaminham. Scholars do not agree about the location of such an empire, although José de Ramos argues that the Calaminham is, in fact, the Kingdom of Lanchang or Luang Prabang in Laos (1951b, 2). Mendes Pinto refers to thousands of Burmese priests and devotees, with a total of 226 carriages taking part in the procession: "Each one of these carriages was four decks high, and some even five, with an equal number of wheels on each side" (CATZ, 1989, p. 341), and "mounted at the very top was a silver idol with a golden mitre on its head, all of them bedecked with pearl necklaces and splendid collars of precious stones" (CATZ, 1989, p. 341). Thousands of pilgrims propelled the cars by pulling long ropes, passing through hundreds of streets. Entertainment was provided along the way through "theatrical interludes," tables of food to be distributed for the love of God, clothes given out, debts forgiven, feuds reconciled—"and many other pious deeds were performed, so much in keeping with Christian ethics that had they been done with faith and baptism in the name of Christ our Lord,

¹¹ My summary is based on Starza, 1993, 14-17.

without the intrusion of worldly matters, it seems to me that they would have been acceptable to him, but the best was wanting in them, for their sins, and for ours” (CATZ, 1989, p.342).

Initially, Pinto suggests that the festival presents rituals worthy of “Christian ethic,” but this only serves to enhance the shock value of something that becomes demonic and horrifying. He immediately goes to great lengths to distance himself from the strange frenzy. He indicates that “sinners approach,” shouting “zumbaias,” prostrate themselves, and then throw themselves in sacrificial suicide under the moving carriages. Other worshippers, coming with knives, mutilate their bodies and cut pieces of their own flesh. Pieces of flesh, from those who had thrown themselves under the carriages and of the self-mutilators, are collected in a large bowl and then thrown to the crowd, “for they regarded them as extremely holy relics” (CATZ, 1989, p. 343). Amidst widespread mutilation and dismemberment, some “dressed in tiger skins, holding copper pots under their arms filled with a certain concoction of putrid urine mixed with human feces,” begged for alms. These miserable creatures would throw human waste at those who denied them alms.

By creating a demonic parody of a Catholic procession on a feast day, Pinto underscores the moral lesson: he suggests that the Burmese do not lack in “good judgment and wit” in other areas, but in their worship they observe “many other kinds of blind spots and brutish customs” beyond human understanding. Unlike the Portuguese, they are not guided by “the infinite mercy and goodness He [Christ] has shown us, by giving us the light of true faith wherewith to save our souls” (CATZ, 1989, p. 343). Therefore, because of the misguided fervor of their religious observance, they embark on a journey, not to heaven but to hell.

In fact, this festival presumably did not take place in Burma; rather, Mendes Pinto made it entirely up by transferring to lower Burma distorted and exaggerated accounts of the Cult of Jagannatha. José de Ramos argues that Mendes Pinto, in fact, extracted “extraordinary things” from books or hearsay; he adds: “Consequently, if he [Mendes Pinto] appeared to lie or exaggerate, it should be attributed to his informers or to the books to which he referred” (1951b, p. 198). Likewise, in his book, *Grand Peregrination*, Maurice Collis poses a central question: “What can have been Pinto’s object in inserting at this point a long and detailed account of a kingdom which was not any where?” (1949, p. 189). Collis posits, however, that “Pinto was particularly interested in the phantasmagoria of oriental beliefs,” because Pinto thought that these beliefs reflected the power of a supreme God (1949, p. 189). In my view, that is precisely the

point. Pinto does indeed create a “phantasmagoria of oriental beliefs,” but, I would add, Mendes Pinto describes the Burmese festival as a symmetrical counterpart to the journey and mission of Francis Xavier, the Apostle of the Indies, who died on an island 30 miles off the coast of Canton, December 3, 1552. William V. Bangert writes that Xavier pleaded with Chinese merchant to provide him transportation to China, eventually finding one who agreed to take him for three hundred and fifty-three *cruzados*: “Francis waited for the ship that never came” (Bangert, 1986, p. 34).

I do not have the space here to discuss Pinto’s 16 chapters on Francis Xavier, but a clear contrast emerges, through which Pinto tries to explain the uphill battle that Xavier faced in evangelizing Asia, especially Japan and China. Pinto refers to “the diabolical bonzes” of Japan, “ministers of the devil,” who mockingly challenge Xavier at theological disputations, and other profound cross-cultural misunderstandings between the Jesuits and the Japanese. Pinto indicates that the Japanese word for lie is “diusa”; mispronouncing Deus (God) as if it were “*dius*” (lie); likewise, he adds, “Now because the word *santi* is an obscene and disgraceful word in the Japanese language,” Xavier had to switch to “*Beate Petre, beate Paule*” (CATZ, 1989, p. 489). Taking his readers to Xavier’s death, Pinto explains at great lengths the “miracle of incorruptibility” (Chapter 216, Catz, 1989, p. 498-499)—the body of the saint, buried and then exhumed months later, and finally laid to rest at the College of Saint Paul in Goa. Throughout the journey, the body of Xavier inspires devotion and respect; whereas the Burmese festival inspires horror. Pinto creates a morality play in which the festival in Burma functions as a “*barca do inferno*,” transporting frenzied worshippers to eternal doom. Religious frenzy functions as a juggernaut, sweeping under its mighty wheels the efforts of the Apostle of India.

III.

From its earliest history, travel writing has brought together first-hand observation and fantastical fabricated fiction. Herodotus, the writer of *Histories*, became known not only as the father of history but as a liar; similar charges have been leveled at Sir John Mandeville and Marco Polo. Many of these travelers, including Shakespeare’s character, Othello, illustrate a well-known proverb in Shakespeare’s time: “A traueller may lye by authoritie” (CAMBEN, 1629, p. 261). Of Mendes Pinto writes D. G.E. Hall: “The other filibuster, who writes of Burma

in the 16th century, is no less a person than Ferdinand Mendes Pinto, whose extravagant account of his adventures added a new word for falsehood to the European languages” (1945, p. 14).¹² Hall concludes, however, that “Mendes Pinto is not so much a liar as an inveterate rhetorician” (HALL, 1945, p. 342); and that “Samuel Purchas has a high opinion of the value of his book and is supported by a number of modern scholars of high repute” (HALL, 1945, p. 14). In the nineteenth century, Sir Arthur P. Phayre thought that Pinto does not exaggerate any “more than other European travelers of the sixteenth century do,” although “his geography of the interior of the countries he passed through, is certainly difficult to be reconciled with what is now known; but that is no reason for attributing to him willful falsehood, in the description of his journey from Burma through a part of Laos” (PHAYRE, 1883, p. 265; CATZ, 1983).

One travels for many different reasons: to broaden the mind, to gain knowledge of distant lands and cultures, to worship at a sacred site, to conduct business, to escape persecution, and so forth. Travel accounts take many different shapes and forms. William H. Sherman surveys travel books and types of travel in the early modern period (2002, p. 17-36). He indicates that editors, such as Richard Hakluyt and Samuel Purchas, collect travel accounts; pilgrims, such as Sir Richard Torkyngton, describe their journeys to holy places; quests of knights-errant find their way into early modern writings (cf. Spenser’s *Faerie Queene*; Beaumont’s *Knight of the Burning Pestle*) (SHERMAN, 2002, p.17-36). Merchants, explorers, colonizers, captives and runaways, ambassadors, pirates, scientists leave their own accounts. Sherman, quoting Philip Edwards, suggests that we should always be mindful of “our ability to gauge the difference between their accounts of what happened and what actually happened” (SHERMAN, 2002, p.31). He adds, “authors played with the boundaries between eyewitness testimony, second-hand information, and outright invention, and readers were often unsure whether they were reading truth or fiction” (SHERMAN, 2002, p. 31).

The pervasive apocalyptic tone of Pinto’s account suggests that the author wants to shape a narrative that tells (1) a personal tragedy—wanderings and chosen exile, being sold into slavery, forced labor, captivity and escape; and (2) an uplifting story of an encounter with a saint on a mission—Xavier’s heroic attempts to spread the gospels in Asia. These are all failed

¹² For a survey of the period of Burmese history presumably represented in Mendes Pinto’s account, see Harvey, 1967, p. 153-216. Tabinshwehti (ruled from 1531-50) restored the kingship, and founded the Toundoo Dynasty (1531-1752), and “in 1535 started his career of conquest by attacking Lower Burma, probably because it was prospering on maritime trade and contained more loot than the North country” (Harvey, 1967, p. 153).

missions, compounded by King Sebastian's own failure to defeat the forces of Islam in North Africa. To explain these disasters, Pinto creates a masterful juggernaut of evil, which only a returning triumphant Christ can defeat. The most sensational, one might say the central and pivotal chapter of Pinto's *Travels*, becomes a powerful *Barca do Inferno*, a theatrical spectacle that he claims to have been a spectator to and which he resisted. James Duncan and Derek Gregory suggest that "all travel writing, as a process of inscription and appropriation, spins webs of colonizing power, but to locate travel writing within this discursive formation also involves plotting the play of fantasy and desire, and the possibility of transgression" (DUNCAN; GREGORY, 1999, p.3). Travel does not only provide "a space of observation but a space of comparison," and "as an act of translation" produces "a tense in-between" space (DUNCAN; GREGORY, 1999, p.3-4).

Chapter 160 of *Peregrination* bears all the markings of a fantastical narrative, rather than first-hand, eye-witness account, such as the phenomenal number of cars and exaggerated frenzy of the worshippers, shockingly grotesque self-mutilation, mass suicide of thousands of worshippers, the throwing of feces and urine at the worshippers, pieces of human flesh thrown at the crowd, and finally the moral lesson that Pinto draws at the end of the chapter. All of this provides a sharp contrast to Xavier's evangelical mission. The Burmese Festival, however, becomes a symbol for the East, a juggernaut.

I have been arguing that, writing for a home audience, Mendes Pinto represents the fictive Burmese Festival of Xipatilau as a *A Barca do Inferno* (VICENTE, 1997, p.70); therefore, it acquires an apocalyptic tone, reinforced by contemporary events such as Sebastian's defeat and death, the death of Francis Xavier, and the difficulties in evangelizing Japan and the East in general. Pinto wants his audience to see that even Xavier, prefiguring Christ, could not overcome the forces of evil.

At the end of another play dealing with a similar topic, *Boat to Heaven*, Vicente writes about the souls left bemoaning on the shores of a lake, crying in the darkness: "We are frightened." A stage direction describes the final moments: "The Angel moves farther from the shore. The crying of the souls rises and echoes like a song of lamentation. Their pain and suffering is plain. Christ the Redeemer appears and gives them the oars which are the wound and dolours of crucifixion, and takes them with him. Only Death remains to contemplate the world" (VICENTE, 1997, p.96). Pinto's narrative, caught in that space between home and foreign place

offers a theatrical spectacle, which suits the purposes of teaching a moral lesson to those left at home. Like the playwright, Mendes Pinto invites his audience to hear the lesson that leads to salvation, not damnation. Whether conscious or not of Gil Vicente's *Barca do Inferno*, Mendes Pinto creates the strangest of theatrical spectacles; in the process, he helps us confront the resemblance between travel and theater.

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