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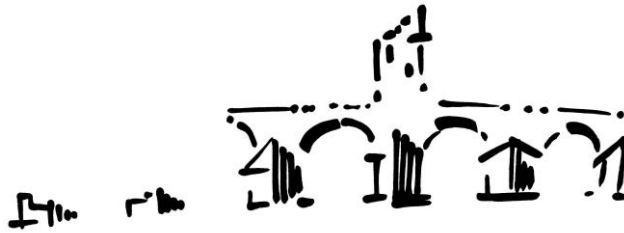

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Naufrágio e Literatura

Coordinación
José Cândido de Oliveira Martins
Maria Luísa Leal

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Vol. 12.2. – 2018

Naufragio y Literatura

SUMARIO / SUMÁRIO

José Cândido de Oliveira Martins / Maria Luísa Leal – Naufrágio e Literatura 9-17

José Manuel Herrero Massari – Mares simbólicos, mares trágicos, mares épicos y mares lamentosos: de Gilgamesh a Mendes Pinto 19-37

Carlos Jorge Figueiredo Jorge – Um Mito do Tráfico Marítimo e das Desventuras da Ambição. *O Navio Fantasma, ou o Holandês Voador* 39-66

Kioko Koiso – Naufrágio de Sepúlveda: uma sequência da transformação da história no decurso das edições 67-94

Angélica Madeira – Shipwreck narratives: between History and Literature. Reflections on *História Trágico-Marítima* (Tragic-maritime History) 95-111

António Manuel de Andrade Moniz – Ecos do Tema do Naufrágio na Literatura Portuguesa 113-128

Isabel Soler – Un miserere para la soledad del náufrago 129-152

Testimonios / Testemunhos

Ana Margarida de Carvalho – Do meu mar vê-se a língua 155-162

Fernando Dacosta – O rumor do mar 163-166

Miguel Real – Naufrágios. O lado escuro da expansão portuguesa 167-172

Varia

Raquel Alonso Parada – Mudanzas de xénero no substantivo na tradución galega da *General Estoria* 175-193

Sara Antoniazzi – "Que é feito de Jules Laforgue?" I tratti laforguiani del *Livro do Desassossego* 195-213

Ana Cristina Pereira Braz – Les stratégies discursives de l´ironie dans le débat parlementaire portugais 215-239

Augusto Lorenzino – Family ties, dwelling and mobility in the development of Barranquenho 241-258

Reseñas / Recensões

Juan M. Carrasco González – Dolores Corbella, Alejandro Fajardo (Eds.), *Español y portugués en contacto. Préstamos léxicos e interferencias,* Berlin/Boston, Walter de Gruyter GmbH, col. Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für romanische Philologie, 2017, 430 pp. 261-265

Juan M. Carrasco González – Xosé Luis Regueira, Elisa Fernández Rei (Eds.), *Estudos sobre o cambio lingüístico no galego actual,* Santiago de Compostela, Consello da Cultura Galega, 2017, 326 pp. 265-270

Stefania Chiarelli – Angélica Madeira, *Livro dos naufrágios* – ensaio sobre a história trágico-marítima. Brasília, Editora Universidade de Brasília, 2005, 396 pp. 270-272

Xosé Manuel Dasilva – Luís de Camões, *Los Lusiadas (Selección)*, Madrid, Ediciones Rialp, 2017, 109 pp. *Introducción, traducción y notas de Rafael Gómez Pérez*. 272-275

Maria Graciete Besse – Uma prática da *Relação*: *Archipelagos-Passagens*, de Amélia Muge e Michales Loukovikas, Peripluis, 2018, CD- Álbum. 276-283

Normas de publicación / Normas de publicação 285-290

*L*imite
Revista de Estudios Portugueses y de la Lusofonía

Vol. 12.2 – 2018

Shipwreck and Literature

SUMMARY

José Cândido de Oliveira Martins / Maria Luísa Leal – Shipwreck and Literature 9-17
José Manuel Herrero Massari – Simbolic Seas, Tragic Seas, Epic Seas, and Woeful Seas: from Gilgamesh to Mendes Pinto 19-37
Carlos Jorge Figueiredo Jorge – A Myth of Maritime Traffic and the Misadventures of Ambition. The Phantom Ship or the Flying Dutchman 39-66
Kioko Koiso – Sepúlveda shipwreck: a sequence of the story changing through the editions 67-94
Angélica Madeira – Shipwreck narratives: between History and Literature. Reflections on *História Trágico-Marítima* (Tragic-maritime History) 95-111
António Manuel de Andrade Moniz – Echoes of the Shipwreck Accounts in the Portuguese Literature 113-128
Isabel Soler – A Miserere to the castaway's solitude 129-152

Reflections

Ana Margarida de Carvalho – From my sea you can see the language 155-162
Fernando Dacosta – The rumor of the sea 163-166
Miguel Real – Shipwrecks.The dark side of overseas expansion 167-172

Varia

Raquel Alonso Parada – Changes of gender in the substantive in the Galician translation of the *General Estoria* 175-193
Sara Antoniazzi – "Que é feito de Jules Laforgue?" The Laforguian traits in *Livro do Desassossego* 195-213
Ana Cristina Pereira Braz – Irony´s discoursive strategies in Portuguese parliamentary debate 215-239
Augusto Lorenzino – Family ties, dwelling and mobility in the development of Barranquenho 241-258

Book Reviews

Juan M. Carrasco González – Dolores Corbella, Alejandro Fajardo (Eds.), *Español y portugués en contacto. Préstamos léxicos e interferencias,* Berlin/Boston, Walter de Gruyter GmbH, col. Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für romanische Philologie, 2017, 430 pp. 261-265

Juan M. Carrasco González — Xosé Luis Regueira, Elisa Fernández Rei (Eds.), *Estudos sobre o cambio lingüístico no galego actual,* Santiago de Compostela, Consello da Cultura Galega, 2017, 326 pp. 265-270

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Xosé Manuel Dasilva – Luís de Camões, *Los Lusiadas (Selección)*, Madrid, Ediciones Rialp, 2017, 109 pp. *Introducción, traducción y notas de Rafael Gómez Pérez*. 272-275

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Standards of publication 285-290

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Shipwreck narratives: between History and Literature. Reflections on *História Trágico-Marítima* (Tragic-maritime History)

Relatos de naufragio: entre Historia y Literatura. Reflexiones sobre la *Historia Trágico-Marítima*

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Resumen

Este artículo sobre la *Historia Trágico-Marítima* (Brito: 1735/36) explora las narraciones, en primer lugar, por los datos empíricos que contienen –un enfoque socio-histórico– en busca de fragmentos para reconstruir una sociedad marítima específica. A continuación, se centra en el principal conjunto de imágenes, unidas por una alegoría que es la razón de ser y el mayor interés del informe: "Tempestad y naufragio". Esto constituye el núcleo del relato, inmerso en una construcción barroca que organiza una narración compleja y las convenciones retóricas de los nuevos discursos que surgen junto con el imperio europeo.

Las narraciones de los naufragios parecen ser la clave para entender los vínculos que existen entre el discurso, el acontecimiento y la sociedad, especialmente desde que esos textos surgieron en un momento en que el imperio portugués estaba en decadencia. La historia, la etnografía y la ficción se entrelazan en este nuevo género literario, que constituye un discurso de contracoherencia en relación con la escritura histórica oficial.

Palabras clave: Trágica historia maritime – alegoría barroca – literatura e historia.

Abstract

This article on *História Trágico-Marítima* (*Tragic-maritime History)* Brito:1735/36), explores the narratives firstly for the empirical data they contain – a socio-historical approach – in search of fragments in order to reconstruct a specific maritime society. It then focuses on the main ensemble of images, bound together by an allegory which is the *raison d'être* and the major interest of the report: "Tempest and Shipwreck". This constitutes the core of the account, embedded in a Baroque construction which organizes a complex narrative and the rhetorical conventions of new discourses emerging together with the European empire.

Shipwreck narratives seem to be a key to understanding the links that exist between discourse, event, and society, especially since those texts emerged at a moment when the Portuguese empire was in decline. History, ethnography and fiction are intertwined in this new literary genre, which constitutes a counter-coherence discourse in relation to official historical writing.

Key-words: Tragic-maritime History – Baroque allegory – Literature and History.

Tragic-maritime History is a collection of 12 shipwreck narratives, a new literary genre that emerged in Portugal in the late 16th and early 17th centuries. Published and sold in booklet form, these accounts enjoyed huge public success in their time in all ranks of society. These shipwreck accounts were collected for the first time and published as a whole in Lisbon in two volumes by Portuguese historian Bernardo Gomes de Brito (1688-1759).[1] He rescued from obscurity these texts which constitute precious documents on social history, specifically on everyday life in a maritime society. The narratives also illuminate the construction of European identity stemming from

[1] Gomes de Brito planned to publish other shipwreck narratives, but gave up, perhaps due to the long time spent on obtaining the licenses, necessary for any writing to be published, from the Holy Office. In fact, a third volume containing six accounts was published in Gomes de Brito's lifetime but not under his supervision. All references and citations, translated by me, are from the 1998 edition, published in Rio de Janeiro by Lacerda/Contraponto, henceforth cited as HTM. Citations of the shipwreck of the Santo Antonio come from Charles Boxer´s article "Jorge d´Albuquerque Coelho: a Luso-Brazilian hero of the sea, 1539-1602", published in 1969 in vol.6, Luso-Brazilian Review. He also published, in 1968, *Tragic History of the Sea* – 1559-1565, a selection and translation of six narratives, at the instigation of the Hakluyt Society by Cambridge University Press.

Christianity and from the comparison with other peoples and cultures encountered by Europeans in Africa, Asia or America, following a shipwreck, when the survivors were outcasts in distant coasts. In this sense, these shipwreck accounts are documents, recording historical and ethnographic data.

However, more relevant than this referential level, at least for the history of Portuguese literature or even for the history of Western prose, is their literary construction. Certainly, the core sequence – tempest and shipwreck – can be found in most canonical texts of the Western literary tradition such as the fragment of St. Paul's shipwreck in the Bible, or Ulysses´s shipwreck before reaching Ithaca, his native land. Images of shipwreck also appear in medieval poetry and in contemporary sixteenth-century literature, such as Camões' epic poem *Os Lusíadas* (Blackmore: 2002).[2] Here, in contrast with the narration of brave Portuguese exploits, a sequence of the tragic fate in 1554 of the Galleon São João and of Captain Sepulveda and his entire family is inserted.

New insights into shipwreck narratives have been made possible by contemporary literary and cultural studies which shed a different light on the shipwreck accounts. Scholars are committed to exposing the imperialistic agenda present in the prolific historiography attendant on European activity abroad. According to Blackmore (2002: XXI; 47) although the accounts emerged from an expansionist context, they represent a rupture, a break in the official hegemonic view of the empire since they are stories of failure. Narratives of disasters are prone to readings that emphasize the counter-coherence principle, which consists of deviating the focus from the evolutionary and official narratives to elicit their incompleteness, their suggestive blanks: "…since the conquest is said to be the issue, I will start with loss; since strength is said to be the major asset of characters, I will start with the victims" (Bal 1989: 17).

One of the hypotheses proposed here, is that the shipwreck narratives gather conventions of discourses not yet codified as such, as

[2] Blackmore´s analysis of the literary sources of the shipwreck narratives in the Iberian tradition explores Alfonso X´s *Cantigas de Santa Maria* (Songs of Holy Mary), where he identifies "the most significant literary ancestor of HTM" (xxvi) in terms of symbolism. He also explores the X canto of *Os Lusíadas* (1572) where Camões included the shipwreck of the S. João, and the tragic history of Manuel de Souza Sepúlveda, told by the giant Adamastor. The author argues about the place of those accounts in the Portuguese imperial project.

well as an ensemble of images, which – despite their universality and intertextuality – are historically deeply grounded in their time and culture. The specific interest of shipwreck accounts is the twist the traditional images take in the narrators' hands: they foreshadow the Baroque style a century before its time, presenting its aesthetic taste and a set of values which affected the whole society. The point of view concentrated in the central sequence gives evidence of a set of poetic conventions, exuberant metaphors, complex allegories and parables concerning the meaning of existence and the fleeting nature of health and riches, all anticipating a new cultural form, the Baroque (Maravall: 1990).

The complexity of these narratives is startlingly evident. Hybrid in genre, they mingle history, fiction and ethnography, at a time when these discourses had not yet been codified as such.[3] In fact, the available discourses are tightly intertwined and composed of very heterogeneous cultural material. As a narrative of early nautical life we find the sober writing of technical texts – log books, pilot's guides – historical chronicles, travel accounts. The shipwreck narrative also brings together varied literary sources such as Greek and Latin classics, the Bible, sermons and prayers, proverbs and popular sayings, legends, beliefs, official bureaucratic discourses, as well as scientific knowledge that would have been available to people concerned with navigation. The textual surface is yet more complex since it involves the most varied traditions, depending on the authors' intellectual and social background. There are respectable writers, such as João Batista Lavanha, royal cosmographer at the court of Philip II, or Diogo do Couto, also a nobleman, historian and a friend of Camões. There was also a famous cartographer called Perestrello; an apothecary, Henrique Dias, who used to work for Prior do Crato's house; two Jesuit priests, with their humanistic intellectual background; not forgetting the anonymous narrators who add a popular taste and a particular bias and interest to the shipwreck narratives. In fact, despite their recurrent structure, shipwreck narratives are very dissimilar. Each account is

[3] According to Michel Foucault (1981) human sciences appeared in the 19th century as specific discourses (sociology, psychology) emerging as a rupture with empirical sciences. They offer answers to the questions posed by the time and from now on human beings' representations becam object of science. Ethnography and psychoanalysis are interpreted by the philosopher as counter – sciences, discourses which argue the principle of rationality. History became the leading science and pervaded all fields of knowledge.

guided by a particular view of the narrator who handles and selects the agreed conventions, fixing a mobile image, capturing a gesture or a pose from a flow of events.

The involvement of the whole of Portuguese society in the country's navigation can be attested by these narratives. Overseas trade itself fostered the emergence of other parallel institutions, stimulating enormous social changes. Shipyards, fortresses, monasteries, colleges and food factories were only a few of the institutional spaces and new employers that advanced with the impetus of trade and colonization. Ships' chandlers, supplying or fitting out the ships with sails and ropes, possibly required the collective work of women, men, and children. During the long hours spent together, they told and retold never-ending histories of sea travels and shipwrecks.

The importance these accounts achieved at that time is undeniable. The large number of issues of the *libretos* (booklets) is the best indicator of their success.[4] Shipwreck accounts could function as a source of information for the travelers' relatives left behind (Saramago:1972); but they were also endowed with other pragmatic functions, revealing the narrator's intention to put the experience into a written form, a task which allowed him to shake off bad memories, warn others in similar situations, and keep a promise certainly made in the midst of a dangerous path. In this case, the narrative works as an *ex-voto,* a concrete acknowledgement of an individual survivor who has pledged to bear witness to a collective experience. Perhaps the main reason for the success of these narratives can be found in the mass appeal of dramatic stories, deeply rooted then as now in the public taste. The readers or listeners would have been drawn into the event of the wreck, drowning in the raw and detailed depiction of the scene. The archaic resonance of the sea in people's unconscious then acquired new configurations and new pictorial and conceptual conventions. It seems that by the end of the 16th century, the wave of popular maritime literature, often published in cheap pamphlet form, had spread all over Europe[5] (Goede: 1989; Curto: 1992).

[4] By the end of the 16th century, the average print-run of a successful book was estimated at about three hundred copies. However, there is a reference, in the 1601 second edition of the "Shipwreck of Jorge d´Albuquerque Coelho", to a previous edition, each one being of one thousand copies (quoted in Lanciani: 1973).

[5] In his analysis of maritime Dutch and Flemish painting of the seventeenth century, Goedde (1988) identifies their literary sources, and makes reference to the Portuguese "*Roteiros*" (Itineraries) that had become available in Holland in the previous century.

1. Ship's architecture and social hierarchy

A three-decked merchant ship – with her characteristic convex profile, slow, heavy, and hard to control – does not hide the primary goal of Portuguese seafaring. Stocking up to 800 tons of goods, with room for more than 1000 people, the ship's external design does, however, conceal the human life within its body. Inside, small rooms, dark galleys, a covered deck, multiple places of watching. The internal architecture provides a blueprint of the span and limits of each actor's role.

This is a "total institution", a place of residence and work, where a bunch of heterogeneous individuals become equals in a common fate (Goffmann: 1961, XIII); or more precisely, those aboard the ship form a "social hybrid", a secluded community constituted for the circumstances of that voyage; a floating society, separated from the wide world by the greatest of all barriers, the Ocean.

Outside, cutting along the bent lines of her cavernous exterior, a gentle curve outlines the round profile, growing, suddenly, at the extremities, up to the inflexion of the prow and stern. Round sails full of wind. The ship – seen at a distance – follows her ceaseless route across the waves. Inside, a heterogeneous population travel. When danger looms, such as the threat of a shipwreck, driving everybody toward the same fate, only hypothetically could people remain separated; their bodies and destinies would mingle. Tensions at decisive moments, uncertainty about the amount of power exercised either by the Captain or by the helmsman, controversy about the exact route to be followed at critical moments would certainly occur.

The simple menace of shipwreck sparked immediate collective reactions. Although a nobleman could be helpful in pumping water from the hold, which in itself displays a shift in the moral division of the work, the breakdown of hierarchies seems to have been very temporary, only occurring at crucial moments.

Fear of death was certainly a common concern, and new and unexpected sympathies could be triggered among servants and their masters, officers and sailors. It is reported that at crucial moments everybody, regardless of social status, congregated for prayers and hymns. Despite this, the social groups represented in the ship continued to show their differences, even at the moment of the *jettison*. This is a classical motif repeated in all narratives, when, to lighten the

burden of the ship, boxes were thrown out into the sea, although in a hierarchical order. The first chests to be thrown into the sea were those belonging to sailors and soldiers, followed then by those of the officers and nobles, and only in the last resort were the King's and the Church's belongings jettisoned. Noblemen were almost always asked to assume leadership in critical situations, and, whenever it was question of survival on the improvised rafts or lifeboats, they, along with the priests and officers, would be the first to embark, leaving sailors, cabin boys, servants, soldiers, and a huge number of slaves waiting in the broken ship. Slaves were not counted among the men. It is with great candor that the narrators say they lost 45 men and 236 slaves. Slavery was maintained even after the wreck when the survivors started the most arduous part of their adventure: the march into unknown and hostile lands. Slaves were used to carry noble men and women, and did so until they decided to escape or collapsed from fatigue.

2. Emotions and feelings

Anxiety was another general emotion connected with ships. Since the main goal of these travels was material success, there are many reports of mariners' and soldiers' fantasies and dreams about becoming rich, obtaining gold and precious gems, followed by a wealthy marriage. Against these expectations the menace of a shipwreck raised painful feelings such as derision of their own ideals, guilt and fear. Catholicism exploited them to the maximum, mainly through sermons. The wreck, seen as a divine punishment, served to distance the responsibility from what was clearly human failure, charging fate, or God's will, as responsible for the catastrophe. Only the Jewish-Christian tradition of guilt could emphasize at such a point the idea of crime followed by punishment for our sins, often greed or avarice, strictly economic vices. If becoming rich and enjoying the pleasures of the world could spur those people into such a risky enterprise, it could not be guilt-free. The only way to bear such a feeling and endow the tragic event with meaning was the belief in the salvation of souls. The idea of life after death would explain negligence in relation to safety, justifying the small value assigned to human life.

All passengers and crew members sought confession when death was imminent, but did so in different ways. While common people cried their sins aloud, nobles preferred to confess in a low voice and never showed their emotions openly, which illustrates how feelings are conventionally constructed and represented. It also

illustrates the fractured and fragile nature of society, how contradictory it became when a catastrophe loomed over that entire crew, constraining people to face death together.

3. Seamen's Religion

In the moment of imminent danger, all the traditional religious practices and imagery related to the sea emerge[6]. From such a mobile and insecure place, saints were called on for help, litanies and *misereres* were recited, desperate cries of repentance of sins were heard, along with promises of pilgrimages if the victim could escape alive from that risky situation. The depiction of this conflict-ridden scene displays how fragile people become, and how they ask for reliable leadership in extreme circumstances. One only has to consider the power of human speech giving directions in the midst of a marooned group. Charismatic leaders, such as Jorge d' Albuquerque or D. Luis de Vasconcelos, gifted with eloquence, performed an important role in these extreme situations. Religious beliefs are more efficacious when they display their power to transcend utilitarian or worldly concerns.

Lingering medieval devotions such as devotion to Our Lady, or to unofficial saints such as the Portuguese St Gonçalo, or beliefs in signs inscribed in the moon, and in the magical power of the will-o'-the-wisp were only a few examples showing the syncretism of maritime religious life.

Religious involvement is also confirmed by the promises of votive offerings to thank God for being rescued from a shipwreck. These practices reveal many interesting aspects of Iberian mariners' traditional habits, and are an important clue to how to approach inner reactions to the catastrophe.

These examples can add more understanding to the post-Renaissance mind, showing how long-lived ideas (Braudel:1969) persist, and how the established interpretation of religious dogmas can change at a liminal moment such as a shipwreck. In order to avoid the disintegration of the ship's community, the Catholic Fathers managed

[6] According to Bakhtin (1972), despite the great changes in European society since the 15th century there was no sudden change between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, especially in terms of mentality, and popular traditions. About the presence of popular culture in HTM, see Madeira: 2005, pp. 113-141.

to maintain an atmosphere of peace, bringing arguments from the Gospels to embody their messages of solidarity.

Almost all the twelve narratives of *Tragic-Maritime History* take place on the India route; two of them are of ships directed to India but blown to the Brazilian coast or to the Caribbean. The shipwreck of the Santo Antonio, leaving the port of Olinda in 1565, is the only one dealing directly with the Brazilian route. This account is *sui generis* in many aspects. It mingles the shipwreck scene with battle found in traditional chronicles. The main character, Jorge d'Albuquerque, typifies the noble gentleman who is at the same time a warrior – fearless, charismatic – and a saint – faithful, generous, just; but his most important character trait is as the man who gives good advice, who is able to calm the desperate crew with his inspired sermons.

Jorge d'Albuquerque, although born in Pernambuco in 1539, went to Portugal as a child and, after his father's death, came back to Brazil to help his brother Duarte Coelho in the fight against the Caeté, a hostile and rebellious Indian tribe which threatened Portuguese settlers. As his private army endured appalling conditions, feeding on land crabs and manioc flour, being wounded many times, camping under palm leaves, they were rewarded by 'the encouraging words which Jorge d'Albuquerque gave his soldiers, keeping them satisfied and contented' in crucial moments. He made encouraging speeches urging all men on board, soldiers and mariners to help him: his words were enough to maintain the cohesion of the low-spirited group.

> Most beloved brothers in Christ, let us recall the holy saying of the Gospel that *Omne regnum in se divisum desolabitur*, a Kingdom divided against itself cannot stand; and with concord small things are great, whereas with discord great things decline and diminish (THS, 1969: 74)[7].

The narrative of the wreck of the São Paulo takes place in the waters of Sumatra in 1561. After sailing around the Cape of Good Hope, there arose the recurrent quarrel among the officers and other experts in navigational problems, concerning the route to be pursued: whether to take the inner passage (via the Mozambique Channel) or the outer passage (to the east of Madagascar) to India. They decided to take the outer passage, and were blown far away beyond India, during a season of squalls and thunderstorms. They stopped on one of the

[7] Translation by Charles Boxer: 1969, p.74.

sixteen or seventeen islets, landing before nightfall, but even the landing was troubled: the captain stood by the side of the ship with a sword in his hand preventing anyone from getting into the lifeboat before the women and children. The narrator comments:

> It is certainly a most miserable thing to recount the behavior of human nature, and still so to weep for its covetousness and wretchedness. For the ship was still drifting toward the islet and had hardly stuck before the seamen were pillaging chests, robbing cabins, and tying up bundles, bales, fardels and packages. [8]

Conflict and discord emerged at these moments. Once on land, they reorganized the group, and decided to build a boat to reach Sumatra. However, suspicions arose among people against the officers. Knowing the behavior of the master and of the second pilot on a previous voyage, people feared they would escape in the lifeboats with their friends, leaving the group to die.

Shipwreck did not provoke a real inversion or reversal of hierarchies. What actually happened was a displacement, a rearrangement of value systems, a mixing up in the ship's space, a shift in the social and moral division of labor.

The organization of a stranded group tended to reproduce the form of a family-like structure. Practices of control, and measures to maintain the boundaries within the heterogeneous social group, having been dismantled during a shipwreck, tended to be reestablished. Facing an unexpected situation, the need to make decisions which would have consequences for the entire group, called immediately for the presence of a leader, who embodied the figure or the idea of a father. When this was accomplished, the group had higher chances of survival in hostile lands until rescue came.

4. Tempest and Shipwreck as a Baroque Allegory

Abandoning the documentary bias – despite the fascination of reconstructing life on board from digging in old documents, enacting a kind of historical *archaeology*[9] – one can plunge into aspects of the narrative aesthetics. There are traditional literary conventions

[8] Translation by Charles Boxer: 1968, p.72.

[9] Michel Foucault´s archaeological project aims at describing the internal conditions for the production of knowledge, and offers a powerful method to deal with historical documents (1969).

organized around the main scene, the wreck, unfolding into many strange forms of representation of fear, anguish and death, universal images of enormous poetic power. The shipwreck itself concentrates all this emotional power. The entire narrative is three-pronged, a triptych, where the link between the first and the third parts is the central shipwreck scene. There is a before and an after, but the main event remains the shipwreck. The first part records the preparation and the outset of the voyage, the route, name of the main characters and sometimes some information on colonial politics. The second part opens with a scene of imminent tempest, followed by the wreck itself and closes with the survivors abandoned on desert shores. This is the beginning of the third part: difficult journeys through unknown places and among unknown tribes.

The shipwreck scene organizes all the other parts and consolidates an ensemble of images which become forever related to those narratives. This is the climax, a traumatic point *par excellence*, which calls up all the tragic sense of a lost people, humanity abandoned by God and left at the mercy of untamed nature.

The scene of the shipwreck throws light on the connections between discourse and social imagery, displaying the concreteness of an abstract idea: existence understood as a fearful journey, from which stems an entire repertory of images modulated in the *tableaux*, scenes and figures of death.

This fragment can be considered a motif, like a fleuron, embedded in the middle of the narrative, detachable and repeated almost in the same terms and mood in all shipwreck accounts. The image works as an engraved medal, given the high degree of convention and stylization found in allegory. The significant event is full of meaning: the shipwreck is seen as a slice of fate, exposing a stoic posture – something which happens because it has to happen. Events precede human will. Acquiescence and resignation are not the same. Resignation, in the Jewish-Christian tradition, is related to submission and conformism, while *acquiescence* – coming from stoicism – is a deep understanding of how events happen, act on us, wait for us, make signs, call to us. There is nothing to say except to urge us not to be unworthy of the event, not to make our wounds repugnant.[10]

[10] On the concept of Event in Stoicism see Deleuze (1982).

Images preceding the wreck – heavy clouds, rain, lightning, wind, thunder – are responsible for a kind of soundtrack behind the texts, molding effects of *crescendo* and *diminuendo*, reinforcing intensities, emphasizing dissonances. Images abound during the wreck, when the narrator, able to distance himself at will, alternates his description of the scenes inside and outside the ship, which increases the tension of the drama. On deck, in the galleys men are at work, nobles, soldiers, mariners, pumping water; children and women crying; men confessing their sins aloud; priests reciting litanies; everything in an exalted and grandiloquent tone. After the survivors are stranded on distant beaches, there comes another rich crop of allegorical images, concerning the reversal of fortune: such as people walking along the shore, in procession, attached by ropes, crying for the Good Lord´s pardon, behind a cross or a sacred banner, heading to their deaths.

Despite the different situations, the central image – the shipwreck – is quite similar in all narratives. There is a regular succession of events: from the reading of the signs of a storm, in the winds, clouds and tides, to the stranding of people on distant shores. We are in the domain of pure allegory. Other images are insistently repeated, such as the jettison, already cited, when people need to relinquish their possessions if they want to save their lives. This is also the domain of the parable, this genre of allegorical narrative pointing at the necessity to unfasten material goods, in order to lighten the ship and the soul, giving access to spiritual life. Actually, this is one of the most impressive scenes ever described in writing: the sea littered with expensive goods, rugs, fabrics, bunches of myrrh and perfumed wood, riches before beloved and now despised, as it appears in many accounts of the *História Trágico-Marítima.*

Descriptions of untrammeled nature are in full intertextual relation with a long Western literary tradition, and are also, in Greek and Latin tradition, considered a difficult trope for orators in training.[11] The talent to describe landscapes, and more particularly seascapes, became a valuable rhetorical theme in classic culture. It encompasses the reading of signs in nature, announcing the tempest, the fight among

[11] According to Pausanias (1998), describing a tempest or a shipwreck was given as an exercise, the *ekphrasis* of Greek rhetoric, and was considered a challenge for orators. In his Description of Greece, divided in ten books, the geographer describes Ulysses's shipwreck and also Phalanthus ´s wreck in the Crisean sea before reaching Italy.

the elements, the "elemental discord"; the ship's struggle with winds and waves; the jettison and other actions; the shipwreck; the death of the broken ship; scenes of drowning; and scenes of salvation on any shore or swamp.

The scene of the shipwreck is as imposing as abrupt: an avalanche of waves from the pinnacles down to abysses in the depths of the Ocean. All these images contain antinomies: day becoming suddenly night; winds turning into calm; calm into storm; ruptures open to interpretation. These are fleeting situations which concern the frailty of human beings and the ephemeral state of all things.

> … everything represented death; the low part of the ship completely taken by the water; high above, the sky conspired against everybody, because it was covered with the heaviest mist and darkness ever seen. The air whistling from all parts, as it was bawling, death, death… (HTM, Brito:1998, 512).[12]

It is a plangent image – as one of the narrators says – useful to maintain death in front of the eyes and to impel to contrition and pity. In this sense, shipwreck narratives anticipated the funeral oratory of the Baroque period, another discourse spread out in the 17th and 18th century, putting within the reach of the sinner a collection of serious themes for meditation, showing sad characters in deep mourning, old men touched by madness and necessities dying in tragic attitudes.

Scenes of the stranded survivors bring back the theme of the world's reversals, the sudden changes of the wheel of fortune. Among these images we have the unexpected scene of hungry and thirsty men and women camped on priceless rugs and making shelters out of silk and gold fabric rescued from the wrecked ship.

The main characters – Manoel de Souza Sepúlveda, Pantaleão de Sá, Fernão Álvares Cabral, Jorge d'Albuquerque Coelho – although historically real– lose all their empirical existence and, by the narrator´s hand, become allegories, a sort of universal prop of the pain they embody. Aristocrats fall to a low position, victims of treason; merchants now find their riches a hindrance; and noblemen who are not natural leaders may all be obliged to take on authority at critical moments; as are even very old men whose experience is worthless. The world is upside down, values are inverted; there is nobody to ask for insight, nobody to provide wise counsel.

[12] Translated by me.

All the scenes or characters commented on here are attuned to allegorical thinking. Allegory can be understood as a continued metaphor, presupposing a temporal dimension implicit in the narrative chained images. Metaphor – in permanent semiotic activity – plays its role of generating and transporting meaning by its capacity to produce links across the diversity and multiplicity of things. Metonymy selects the detail, practices the close-up and, in so doing, acts as an index of the totality. Both metaphor and metonymy contribute to building the allegorical image letting the reader make associations even if a first level of interpretation is already given: existence as a voyage, a dangerous and daring sea journey, without any guiding axis. The shipwreck makes human beings equal: all are in the same condition, all are guilty and condemned to death. This is the moral underlying shipwreck narratives. They can be considered as pieces made for the cult of suffering, a real tombstone, an invitation to meditate on the proposed contents. These images foreshadow the Iberian Baroque with its inclination to cultivate death, be it in eulogies or in public rites; in tomb sculptures or in entire chapels lined with skeletons and bones. Characters addressing a skull or orators giving a speech in the presence of a corpse are emblematic images of the most universal content of Baroque art: the triumph of death (Benjamin:1984). The shipwreck narratives, with their tragic and stoic ethos, are pieces composed for meditation, sober and silent allegories aiming to emphasize the frailty of life and to incite the sinners' repentance.

Final considerations

Shipwreck narratives are both significant documents and literary pieces. They are important for an *archaeology* of Portuguese maritime cultural history, but, more importantly, they are a unique phenomenon that takes on the role of an amalgam of historical, ethnographic, ideological and fictional discourses, conveying empirical data, views and opinions on other people's customs, and pragmatic guidance on how to act in calamitous situations. Indeed, emerging at a moment of moral and material crises, these narratives eloquently expose the decadence, the pessimistic feelings pervading Portuguese society, and anticipate the depressing atmosphere in Portugal in the second half of the sixteenth century. This perception was accentuated by dogmatic Catholicism and also by a string of natural disasters such as plagues, earthquakes and floods, as recorded by historians (Saraiva 1983; Mattoso 1993).

This configuration works as a historical ground for the narrators dealing with a traditional set of images which acquire new strength in the light of contemporary risks and dangers faced by society (Douglas:1989). Exhibiting strong poetic images – broken ships under merciless storms in high seas; wounded, starving and marooned people – these accounts stage the fall of human beings, asking for compassion, images filled with emotional power.

Those texts are precious documents on Portuguese colonization revealing the highest viewpoint to consider cultural difference. Despite the universal base of Humanity in Christianity, and their debased position, Europeans will be inevitably self-centered and xenophobic when observing and judging other people´s customs. Narrators never lose their superior position, shadding light on the authoritarian aspects of cultural domination (Said 1990).

Another significant point to emphasize on shipwreck narratives is the flexible role and the multiple functions those texts fulfill, mixing pragmatic and rhetorical concerns. Memory, information, biography, ethnography, epistolography and poetry meet on the textual surface, creating a new genre, bringing up one of the many unclassifiable texts in prose emerging in late 16th century.

These narratives, which do not aim to describe atmospheric phenomena (Blumenberg, n.d.), contain nevertheless a revealing repertory of allegories, an important source of images that place the reader inside 16th century maritime imagination. The link between the first and the second arguments may be found in a principle of method that considers the texts as a *discursive* practice, emerging together with other social practices, stemming from the same necessities and epistemological ground. The India run *(Carreira das Índias)* shipwrecks certainly awakened an unconscious imagery, modelling new forms of fear and death.

Historical events and imaginative creation are close to each other, and this is a theoretical point this article intended to focus on, exploring the archaeological potential of shipwreck narratives as a source for writing cultural and social history but also focusing on a single allegory – tempest and shipwreck –, showing the configurations taken by this traditional image in this late 16th century exemplary Portuguese literature.

Ancient texts may suggest images that speak to our present time threatened by new risks and disasters.

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