

The Baroque as Conversation-Starter

Vincent Barletta

Stanford University

Early on in the Posthumous Works of Frederick II of Prussia (1712-1786), one finds an almost singularly unflattering description of João V of Portugal (1689-1750). Commonly misattributed to Voltaire, Frederick's written portrait of the Portuguese "priest-king" (this is Voltaire's term, found in a 1747 letter to Frederick II) has found its way into numerous historical works, periodicals, magazines, and even popular travel guides.¹ It reads: "Dom João was known only for his strange passion for Church ceremonies. He obtained a papal brief giving him the right to a patriarch; and by another brief he was allowed to perform mass except for the consecration. His pleasures were priestly functions and his buildings convents; his armies were monks and his mistresses nuns" (47).² Frederick II's portrait of João V suggests a man hampered by overzealous religiosity and substantial boundary issues—an assessment neatly and artistically expressed in the palace/monastery in Mafra and one that has become, not by chance, nearly universal over time.

The historical consensus surrounding Frederick II's opinion of João V is significant in and of itself; however, it takes on much greater importance insofar as historians have come to see the Portuguese king's "strange passions" as a kind of synecdoche for Portugal itself during the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Charles R. Boxer, for example, has argued the following:

[John V's] most obvious faults—if that is the right term—were shared by the vast majority of his subjects. A few Portuguese who had lived long in Paris, Rome, London or e Hague and who had been markedly influenced by the ideas of the Enlightenment, might and did deplore King John's passion for gorgeous ritual in church services, his fondness for elaborate religious high-days and holidays, his patronage of the Inquisition and his exaggerated

respect for priests, friars and ecclesiastics of all kinds. But most of his compatriots felt exactly the same way about these things, partly because the numerous religious festivals meant that there were only about 122 working days in the Portuguese year, as Dom Luís da Cunha alleged in 1736. In other words, as the late Jaime Cortesão wrote in his perceptive study of John V, if the King sinned in these respects, he sinned in company with the entire nation. (164)

Boxer is clearly attempting here to put forward a tempered view of João V, one that might mitigate somewhat the popular image of him articulated by Frederick II (though the Prussian king was by no means the first). Shortly before this passage, in fact, Boxer makes the even more direct claim that “the traditional view of King John V as the most sluggish and the most superstitious of the Portuguese kings, active only in his amours with nuns and in his prodigal expenditure on churches and music is largely a caricature” (162). “Largely a caricature” is admittedly not much of an endorsement, even if Boxer may very well have good historical evidence to support his defense of the Portuguese king from the most extreme charges of indolence, stupidity, religious fanaticism, and nonnaphilia. An unquestionably devoted patron of the arts and a more or less capable politician before his 1742 stroke, João V has nonetheless developed over the past two centuries into a kind of icon of Iberian belatedness and inferiority.

The aspect of Boxer’s argument (and he is, as he points out, not alone) that is perhaps most problematic is the claim that João V’s lust for all things religious is in some sense justified by the fact that his subjects (“the entire nation”) were wired in much the same way. At best an improvable cliché and at worst an act of mass defamation, this assertion might very well help to camouflage to some degree João V’s unfortunate predilections; however, it also has the much more unfortunate effect of flattening out the political and cultural landscape of nearly an entire century of Portuguese history. It is, in the end, an all-too-easy explanation for Portugal’s delayed encounter with the Enlightenment, and one that also helps to reduce to the point of absurdity the marked ideological and intellectual complexity that characterized the kingdom and its colonies during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.

Inquisition and empire were certainly in a meaningful sense central themes in Portugal and its overseas colonies during the historical period

conventionally associated with the Baroque—a period that begins with a negotiated loss of sovereignty to Castile and ends (decisively, brutally) with the Lisbon earthquake. However, these are but broad strokes, and it still remains for scholars of early modern Luso-Afro-American literatures and cultures to develop adequate frameworks and methods by which we might help students and other readers to appreciate some of the more finely-grained details and less common themes (and sub-themes) associated with our field of study.

The eight articles contained in this special cluster of *ellipsis* devoted to the Lusophone Baroque—and here it's worth making clear that both "Lusophone" and "Baroque" are understood in this volume to serve as succinct placeholders for the highly varied forms of cultural production that took place in the Portuguese-speaking world (though, somewhat paradoxically, not necessarily in Portuguese) between 1580 and 1755—serve two general purposes. In the first place, they are meant to begin a renewed discussion of the Baroque (as an aesthetic style as well as a metonym for the century-and-a-half of history during which this style was particularly prevalent) among scholars and students of Portuguese literature and culture. Beyond this, however, our hope is also that they work to pull and tear a bit at traditional notions of what is meant when we speak of the Lusophone Baroque; that is, even as they attend to more conventional questions of inquisition and empire (as well as others, such as spectacle, emotion, allegory, decenteredness, and absolutism), they also explore less common themes and arenas of cultural practice and exchange.

Bruno Carvalho, in his account of Cláudio Manuel da Costa (1729-1789) and Ouro Preto, Brazil (known in the eighteenth century as Vila Rica), explores what it is that we mean when we speak of baroque cities and poets in the Luso-Brazilian context. In order to get at this, Carvalho focuses on how Cláudio's Arcadian poetics intersect with both his urban/natural environment and his highly fraught personal life. What emerges is a sophisticated examination of "baroque" as a taxonomic principle in urban development, art history, and poetics, as well as a contextualized description of social structure and relations of power (especially with respect to notions of race and slavery) in colonial Minas Gerais. As Carvalho puts it, building on Sérgio Buarque de Holanda's earlier account of Cláudio and *Arcadismo* in eighteenth-century Brazil, Arcadian poetic forms might very well have served as a kind of modern mask employed by Cláudio and other poets in Minas Gerais as a tool developed to help them

negotiate an increasingly complex and differentiated (in the Durkheimian sense) social landscape built on the sprawling visible ruins of a baroque city.

In his contribution to the cluster, João Figueiredo offers a reassessment of the work of Frei Luís de Sousa (1555-1632). Focusing primarily on Frei Luís de Sousa's plain (and therefore conventionally un-baroque) prose style, Figueiredo argues, with no less a figure than Padre António Vieira (1608-1697) in his corner, that the Portuguese seventeenth century should be considered, at least in light of its dominant prose styles, a much more heterogeneous period than has previously been admitted. Put another way, Figueiredo offers a close and suggestive reading of Frei Luís de Sousa that also points to the large amount of work still to be done within and beyond the enormous shadows cast by Vieira, Luis de Góngora, and other figures more commonly associated with the Iberian baroque. Building out from the work of art historian George Kubler, Figueiredo in fact looks to develop a more flexible (or merely less "static") sense of the baroque that is better equipped to embrace the divergent, if not seemingly opposed, prose styles of writers such as Frei Luís de Sousa and Vieira. Like Carvalho, Figueiredo also provocatively turns to urban space—specifically architecture—as a means to develop his ideas regarding literary style and composition.

In "Revisiting Baroque Poetics in Fernão Mendes Pinto's *Peregrinação*: e Hermeneutics of Worldview," Catarina Fouto explores the baroque poetics that shape the first edition (1614) of Mendes Pinto's prose masterpiece. Focusing on late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century understandings of "world" (building, in part, on Roland Greene's recent work), as well as questions of generic hybridity, polyphony, and forms of spectacle encoded within Mendes Pinto's text, Fouto argues that the "generic hybridity and polyphonic discourse of the *Peregrinação* are intrinsically linked to the shift in worldview brought about at the end of the sixteenth century." For Fouto, it is precisely this dramatic shift in how the world is conceptualized that leads to the development of Baroque style and poetics, and for this reason, she argues, "it makes sense to direct our critical focus toward developing a contextualized, hermeneutic account of Baroque poetics, style, and commonplaces themselves, as well as how these are manifested within the *Peregrinação* and to what effect." To situate the first published edition of Mendes Pinto's text in the world (a world newly framed as decentered and plural) is of the utmost importance to Fouto; and in the end, she argues, it is necessary to attend to the ways in which the *Peregrinação* employs powerful

discursive tools to problematize and disrupt whatever stable, univocal accounts of the world remained.

João Adolfo Hansen, through a sizable reworking of his earlier ideas on the baroque and particularly the poetic corpus attributed to Gregório de Matos (1633/1636-1696), others in “Autoria, obra e público na poesia colonial luso-brasileira atribuída a Gregório de Matos e Guerra” a valuable synthesis of what is known (as well as what is known to be unknown) regarding Matos and poetic production/performance in the manuscript culture of seventeenth-century Bahia. Hansen first gives a summary of Matos’s early editors and the theories of his poetic production that they present. He then moves on to discuss the vicissitudes of manuscript culture in early modern Brazil, making explicit use of Paul Zumthor’s well-known notion of *monvance* and Marcello Moureira’s recent work on variants and scribal accretion in the case of Matos’s *oeuvre*. In the end, Hansen works to contextualize the very notion of “publication” in the context of seventeenth-century Bahia: “No século XVII, os manuscritos que se destinavam a usos de particulares também eram ‘publicação.’ Publicação sempre inacabada, pois era sempre possível acrescentar mais uma página de cópia de impressos ou de transcrição do oral.” At stake in all of this is the very concept of authorship and what it is that we mean when we speak of “Gregório de Matos” and cultural production in colonial Brazil.

In “Portugal as *Nostos* Interrupted,” Christopher Kark examines questions of prophecy and providentialism in Restoration Portugal through a close reading of Gabriel Pereira de Castro’s *Ulisseia* (1636) and António de Sousa de Macedo’s *Ulissipo* (1640). These epic poems, which deal most directly with Lisbon’s mythical founding by the Homeric hero Ulysses, are for Kark subtle (and perhaps even unconscious) theorizations of prophecy, the hollow promise of the *Encoberto*’s return, and the seed of death and oblivion concealed in empire itself. As Kark puts it, “prophecies in both epics confect mirages that extend the promise of nostos [homecoming], while also finding ways of deferring that nostos perpetually or transforming it into its lethal opposite.” at “lethal opposite” runs for Kark throughout Castro’s and Macedo’s epics, much like a recessive allele that nonetheless manages persistently to express itself—a “loathsome canker [that] lives in sweetest bud” as William Shakespeare put it (though on matters more lyrical than epic). As Kark has it, a close and critical reading of *Ulisseia* and *Ulissipo* reveals a great deal about frameworks of empire, prophecy, nationalism, and mortality in the period immediately preceding the Restoration.

Mia Mochizuki invites us in “The Luso-Baroque Republic of Objects and the Contingency of Contact” to examine the material language of the “republic of objects” formed by the Portuguese. Through a focused analysis of the expansive network—extending from the Southern Netherlands to Portugal and on to Japan—of art objects carrying the image of the Virgin of the Immaculate Conception, Mochizuki uncovers the ways in which concrete examples of “classically western subject matter” could establish “local roots” and be put to strategic use within visual and somatic regimes unrecognizable to the Portuguese. The case of Netherlandish prints of the Virgin finding their way eventually into Japanese *fumi-e* panels is a striking example of this phenomenon. As Mochizuki puts it, “far beyond what the waves of missiological imprinting, be it of person or thing, could possibly have predicted, porous Portugal and its Luso-Exchange engineered a mobile imaginary that had to contend with compounded receptions, at distances only barely fathomable, and a cast of characters and armatures of resistance that inhabited such faraway cultural nodes.” And she reminds us of the far-reaching ways in which the active and concrete decentering of both space and vision operated within the period we have come to associate with the baroque.

In “Gracián e Vieira: o lugar do ‘mistério’,” Alcir Pécora examines the central place of Ignatian theories of action, reason, and the senses in the development of a “concepção persuasiva da forma misteriosa” in the work of António Vieira and Baltasar Gracián (1601-1658). For Vieira, Pécora contends, the topos of mystery “não se faz como glosa de teologia especulativa, mas como aplicação dos argumentos teológicos à missão apostólica.” Put another way, Vieira consistently embeds mystery—as a rhetorical topos—within a framework of action and persuasion ultimately meant to effect religious conversion. Gracián, on the other hand, places emphasis on mystery and the formation of an “artifício engenhoso” that is ultimately justified by “o prazer associado ao custo e à dificuldade de obtenção do bem.” With no explicit evangelical project underlying his mobilization of the topic of mystery, Gracián instead focuses on the limits of human understanding within a world suffused with the essence of God. What links these two Jesuit thinkers in terms of their theorization of mystery, argues Pécora, is a willingness to value the rational and the sensible insofar as it is elevated by the presence of God and yet beyond the comprehension of humans.

In “The Terrible Embrace of the Incipient Baroque: Textually Enacting the Union of Crowns,” John Slater moves the discussion to the Molucca and Banda Seas in order to examine the ways in which the images, discourse, and language ideologies associated with the Iberian Union influenced the formation and development of the baroque in Castile and Portugal, as well as vice-versa. Looking especially at Portuguese authors writing in Spanish under Hapsburg rule (and justifying such use of Spanish through explicit claims of “universality”), Slater underscores the uses to which these authors put the Molucca and Banda Islands—the antipodes of the newly “universal” Habsburg empire and the place at which the conjoined Spanish and Portuguese empires “interlocked fingers” at the geographic limit of their global embrace. As Slater puts it: “Encircling the world became simultaneously an emblem of providence and a story of imperial achievement. It also, however, mirrored the movements of texts within the literary economy of the incipient baroque.” is union of incipient baroque aesthetics and providential, imperial ideology in the Pacific is at the center of Slater’s discussion.

Taken as a whole, the articles in the present volume serve as a conversation starter, an invitation to reframe the Lusophone Baroque as something other than a period of religious reactionism and decadence interrupted only by the lightning-bolt sermons of António Vieira. What might emerge from a renewed examination of the Lusophone Baroque? is was the question that gave rise to the current critical cluster, and its answer has yet to unfold.

NOTES

1. Voltaire’s letter begins with a poem that speaks of death’s fear of the King of Prussia, and his preference for a lesser target, such as “le Prêtre Roy de Portugal” (186).
2. The attribution of this statement to Voltaire seems to have its origins in Alphonse de Beauchamp’s entry on João V in the twenty-first volume of the *Biographie universelle, ancienne et moderne*, published in 1818.

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AUTHOR INFORMATION

Vincent Barletta is associate professor of Comparative Literature and Iberian and Latin American Cultures at Stanford University.