

# *In memoriam:* Joaquim-Francisco Coelho (1938-2019)

JOSIAH BLACKMORE  
*Harvard University*

---

Joaquim-Francisco Coelho left this world on September 25, 2019 in the way he inhabited it: quietly and tranquilly, with his loving family by his side. Up to the last, even in fragile health, Joaquim was concerned about the well-being of others, always finding humor in daily existence and offering a joke as a way of putting others at ease and of coming to terms, in some way, with the flux and flow of life itself.

Joaquim-Francisco Coelho was one of the statesmen of Luso-Brazilian Studies, a humanist in the grand tradition whose interests and fluencies extended across many languages and forms of artistic creativity. After earning a PhD at the U of Wisconsin-Madison, he taught at Washington U in St. Louis, Stanford, and finally at Harvard (from 1983 on), where he was the Nancy Clark Smith Professor of the Language and Literature of Portugal and Professor of Comparative Literature. His academic interests ranged widely and included poetry, novels, short stories, and translation, with a special love of and expertise in twentieth-century Portuguese and Brazilian poetry. His many publications are characterized by nuanced, masterly readings of the Luso-Brazilian canon. His first book (on Drummond, who was also a close friend) appeared in 1973, followed by several other volumes over the decades on writers such as Manuel Bandeira, Antero de Quental, Fernando Pessoa, Eça de Queiroz, and his beloved teacher Jorge de Sena. *Letras de jornal*, published in 2010, is a collection of essays with a wide breadth of analysis, including medieval lyric, Luís de Camões, Francisco Manuel de Melo, nineteenth-century poetry, Diego de Velázquez, and Corneille, *inter alia*. Joaquim published a collection of his own poetry, *Os meus Orfeus*, in 2001.

At Harvard, Joaquim Coelho oversaw the growth of the Portuguese program that included a burgeoning undergraduate interest in the field, and he kept the

graduate program in robust health and sought out collaborations with other departments such as Comparative Literature. Under his aegis, a senior Brazilianist (the noted cultural historian of Brazil, Nicolau Sevcenko, d. 2014) joined the faculty of the Dept. of Romance Languages and Literatures. A friend of many renowned figures in literature and the humanities (Vasco Graça Moura, Almeida Faria, Eugénio de Andrade, José Guilherme Merquior, and Antonio Sánchez-Romeralo, to name a few), Joaquim brought luminaries to his classroom and to Harvard in an attitude of easy familiarity and sociability which was an inspiration to students. Any visitor to his office in Boylston Hall would immediately be struck by the range of scholarly interests and erudition testified by the many heavily-used books stuffed onto groaning shelves, books that sat alongside mementos of Joaquim's native Brazil, in particular a company of small statues of St. Sebastian crafted by Brazilian folk artisans that inhabited the corners of tables, the recesses of shelves, and the tops of filing cabinets.

To be a student of Joaquim-Francisco Coelho was to be part of a special world, capacious in its vision of humanistic endeavor and unflinching in its intellectual rigor. And a world in which there was always, always, a joke and a smile. Joaquim's intellectual and personal light shines from on high, his love of learning, his love of words, and his humanity refracted in the lives of his family, friends, and students who remain. In one of his odes, Ricardo Reis wrote, "Assim em cada lago a lua toda / Brilha, porque alta vive."