

Book Review

Mendes, Victor K., and Patrícia Vieira, editors. *Portuguese Literature and the Environment*. Lexington, 2019.

Portuguese Literature and the Environment, edited by Victor K. Mendes and Patrícia Vieira, is a groundbreaking collection that contributes significantly to our understanding of Portuguese environmental literary studies. In the introduction, Vieira notes that, despite the constant presence of the natural world in Portuguese letters, there is a surprising lack of ecocritical scholarship focused on it. This volume's efforts to confront that lacuna will appeal to scholars of Portuguese literature as well as to those interested in ecocriticism and environmental literary studies because of the way that it brings the approaches, interests, and concerns of ecocritical discourse to bear on every major literary period in Portugal.

The book is divided into three sections: 1) "The Environment in Portuguese Culture;" 2) "Portuguese Literature and the Environment from the Renaissance to 1900;" and 3) "Portuguese Literature and the Environment after 1900." Three distinct types of essays cut across these formal divisions: 1) essays that are informative and almost encyclopedic in their approach, 2) essays that examine specific authors and/or texts using the well-established critical apparatus of environmental literary studies, and 3) essays that engage with broader theoretical debates about ecocritical thinking and scholarship. The appeal of these different approaches may vary depending on readers' familiarity with the field of environmental literary studies, but together they complement each other and demonstrate the rich diversity of this volume and its usefulness to the field.

Following Vieira's critical introduction and overview of current scholarship within studies of literature and the environment, the first section opens with three historically oriented examinations of the concepts of nature and the environment in Portuguese culture. Chapter 1, "A Portuguese Approach to the Environmental Crisis," by Viriato Soromenho-Marques, presents an extremely informative list of natural scientists and other writers who took an interest in the natural world in

Portugal and were involved in debates about the environment in Portuguese politics. Chapter 2, “Environment, Nature, and Landscape: Conceptual Affinities and Distinctions in the Portuguese Context,” by Adriana Veríssimo Serrão, similarly gives a broad chronological overview of an array of Portuguese thinkers who have conceptualized Portuguese notions of nature, environment, and landscape. Chapter 3, “Inter-, Multi-, and Trans-Disciplinarity: New Horizons for Portuguese Environmental History,” by Inês Amorim, identifies major writers, significant events, and principal academic publishing venues that have been instrumental in the development of environmental studies/history in Portugal. These three chapters are more encyclopedic in nature, but that is not necessarily a drawback. For anyone undertaking a serious study of the environment in Portuguese literature, this is crucial information that has not been readily available until now.

The fourth and fifth chapters of the book adopt a different approach. Michael Marder’s essay, “Elemental Portugal,” is theoretically creative, insightful, and constitutes an important step forward for the study of the environmental imagination in Camões and Saramago. Marder conceptualizes Portugal’s role in both colonial and postcolonial projects as an “elemental crossroads,” an in-between place “where nothing is secure and existential threats abound [...] in a way that skirts the polarities of capitulation and domination” (66). Vincent Barletta’s essay, “Songs of Stance,” is similarly innovative in its radical new approach to understanding Portuguese medieval *cantigas* by looking beyond referentiality to their “performative and existential footing. In a very literal sense, the *cantigas* are songs of stance; they bear witness to nature [...] even as they call on us, even oblige us, to do the same” (80).

In Chapter 6, “Portuguese Environmental Perceptions of Brazil in the Sixteenth Century,” Maria João Dodman’s well-founded thematic and comparative analysis traces a comprehensive overview of Portuguese attitudes towards Brazil in three texts about its “discovery.” In Chapter 7, “Nature’s Literary Lessons: Júlio Dinis on Literature and the Environment,” Estela Vieira provides a welcome and thoughtful close reading of how Dinis’s work represents nature through an aesthetic framework emerging out of the intersections between romantic and realist impulses in Portuguese fiction. Chapter 8, “On Borrowed ‘Women’s Time’: Ecological Female Bodies and the Re-Engendering of Nature in Eça de Queirós’s *A cidade e as serras*,” by Kathryn Bishop-Sanchez,

exemplifies how an ecofeminist approach can open up a canonical work to new understanding. In Chapter 9, “Hunters of Empire: João Teixeira de Vasconcelos’s Colonial Memoirs of African Hunting,” Isabel A. Ferreira Gould ably demonstrates how textual reflections of Portuguese hunting expeditions and images of Portuguese hunters in Africa animated Portuguese conceptions of wildness and African environments in a colonial and postcolonial context. Chapter 10, Victor K. Mendes’s essay, “Environmentalizing Fernando Pessoa’s Modernism,” proposes an original, perceptive, and surprising ecocritical reading of the environmental imagination present in the modernist poet. In Chapter 11, “The Posthuman Poetry of Sophia de Mello Breyner Andresen,” Patrícia Vieira offers a provocative and theoretically inventive discussion of how Andresen’s poetry complicates the debate around posthumanism. The final chapter, “The Environment and José Saramago’s Literary Program in *Journey to Portugal: In Pursuit of Portugal’s History and Culture*,” by Adriana Martins, focuses on themes of nature in Saramago’s unusual *Journey to Portugal*.

This book suggests several avenues for future research. Why, for example, has there been a hesitance and/or delay in theorizing nature within scholarship on Portuguese literature? How do contemporary approaches differ from earlier forms of scholarship that also thematized the environment? In what ways is the presence of the environment in Portuguese literature distinct from other literary traditions? Addressing issues such as these would help Portuguese literary studies engage with the broader community of comparative studies about the environmental humanities. However, these questions do not detract from the value and quality of this volume. Overall, *Portuguese Literature and the Environment* represents a major contribution in Lusophone environmental literary studies. I congratulate the editors and authors for a fascinating collection of essays.

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