

# Book Review

---

**Pazos-Alonso, Cláudia.** *Francisca Wood and Nineteenth-Century Periodical Culture: Pressing for Change.* Legenda, 2020.

The importance of the periodical press for understanding a culture's literary landscape has long been recognized and has resulted in abundant scholarship dedicated to uncovering and recovering the myriad authors, texts, and publishing venues forgotten by the collective memory. This tremendous endeavor, began around the second half of the twentieth century, has been transformed in the past decade and a half with the development of digital technologies, which have given researchers unprecedented access to a vast amount of material and resulted in an exponential increase in scholarly production in this area of inquiry. Understandably, given its scope, the British periodical press has so far received the most attention, which is why Pazos-Alonso's *Francisca Wood and Nineteenth-Century Periodical Culture: Pressing for Change*, with its focus on one nineteenth-century Portuguese magazine in the context of the Portuguese periodical landscape of the time, while simultaneously offering some connections to the British context, is such a welcome addition to the field. Pazos-Alonso's study of the career of Francisca de Assis Martins Wood (1802–1900) and her periodical *A Voz Feminina* (1868–69)—renamed *O Progresso* in the last six months of its run—brings to light the life and work of a forgotten pioneer of Portuguese letters.

A journalist, novelist, translator, and publisher, Wood was also an early feminist and radical thinker who used her periodical to raise the consciousness of Portuguese women about the ongoing efforts of women in the rest of Europe towards equality (especially access to better education and a widening of the scope of their influence), and to nurture contemporary Portuguese women's access to print so as to create a female tradition of public intellectual engagement. Wood was born in Portugal but moved to England as a young teen. She only returned to Portugal with her English husband four decades later, where she began sharing these progressive ideas through the periodical. Pazos-Alonso details Portuguese male writers' antagonism toward Wood's efforts in *A Voz Feminina*, but admits that most Portuguese women were also unreceptive to her message, with the inevitable result that after two years of sustained efforts, she closed the magazine and redirected her attention to the Press she ran with her husband, the *Tipografia Luso-Britânica*. Pazos-Alonso convincingly argues that Wood's pioneering efforts, like those of other Portuguese women writers of the time, have remained

neglected in histories of Portuguese literature, and that the study of periodical culture is essential to any attempt to recover these voices.

Pazos-Alonso is Associate Professor of Portuguese and Brazilian Studies and Senior Research Fellow at Wadham College, Oxford. Her research on nineteenth- and twentieth-century Portuguese literature, and especially her publications on the Portuguese nineteenth-century periodical press, have culminated in this study, which combines exhaustive archival research with rhetorical analysis to offer a deeply informative book on the Portuguese nineteenth-century literary landscape, its connections to wider, European and North American contexts, and Wood's pioneering, feminist role in it.

*Francisca Wood and Nineteenth-Century Periodical Culture* consists of an introduction, six chapters, a conclusion, and three appendices. Chapter one organizes the scant available biographical information on the Portuguese Wood and her English husband into an admittedly partially speculative version of their lives and their joint efforts to influence the Portuguese cultural scene by disseminating progressive ideas. Chapter two contextualizes Wood's achievements by providing an overview of the literary landscape of nineteenth-century Portugal and discussing a selection of women writers (Antónia Gertrudes Pusich, Maria Peregrina de Sousa, Ana Augusta Plácido, and Josephina Neuville) whose contributions, like Wood's, illustrate how those efforts happened within a continuum between journalism and literature. Chapter three provides an understanding of the role of Wood, her periodical, and the writers she nurtured in fostering the formation of a national female community. Pazos-Alonso discusses six female contributors, focusing on the three most important ones (Emília da Maia, Mariana Angélica de Andrade, and Guiomar Torresão). She also touches briefly on a few male participants and the importance of their support. Chapter four turns to Wood's editorials to offer a close look at their focus on equal rights for women and their skillful arguments designed to raise Portuguese women's consciousness about the negative impact of patriarchal gender expectations on every aspect of their lives. As the author maintains, denouncing "the widespread culture of low expectations for women" is especially central to Wood's efforts (18). Chapter five examines Wood's open letters as part of a strategic attempt to raise important political issues couched in petitions to men in positions of power. Through this discursive strategy, Wood effectively brought a woman's voice into the public sphere of international politics. Chapter six examines the extent to which

Wood succeeded in situating *A Voz Feminina* and *O Progresso* within the international network of feminist and other progressive voices, both through personal connections with prominent foreigners and through the feminist amplification facilitated by periodicals' traditional practice of reprinting articles printed elsewhere. As the author points out, *The Athenaeum*'s notice of the launch of *A Voz Feminina* was quickly picked up by numerous other periodicals, which provided it great international exposure.

*Francisca Wood and Nineteenth-Century Periodical Culture* succeeds admirably in its proposed aim to offer an overview of the Portuguese mid-nineteenth-century periodical press through the closer analysis of Francisca Wood's career as editor of *A Voz Feminina*. It is a groundbreaking study, especially valuable for its extensive archival research that brings to light the figure of a forgotten Portuguese woman writer and pioneer feminist as well as the results of her progressive efforts in both the Portuguese and international contexts. Such an effort necessarily requires abundant contextual information to lay the groundwork for analysis and interpretation; thus, the author cites copious studies, systematically references many other authors sometimes only tangentially connected to Wood and the magazine, and generally covers as much ground as possible to ensure that no detail is overlooked. Such a wide scope can at times read as a little digressive, somewhat diluting the focus of the argument in the pursuit of yet another opportunity to offer further information. But in perhaps sacrificing a little style to a lot of substance, the author chose a scholarly generosity that is further demonstrated by the inclusion of three appendices: a partial list of the titles published by Wood's Press, a full list of Wood's editorials, and a full list of all editorials in her periodical. This information will doubtless prove greatly helpful to other researchers of Wood and of women's presence in the nineteenth-century periodical press. Overall, the book is a strong contribution to the field of nineteenth-century Portuguese literature, periodical culture, and women's studies.

**Manuela Mourão**  
*Old Dominion University*