

Book Review

Ferreira, Patrícia Martinho. *Órfãos do império: Heranças coloniais na literatura portuguesa contemporânea*. Imprensa de Ciências Sociais, 2021.

While many critical works risk losing immediacy within a few years of publication, Patrícia Martinho Ferreira's *Órfãos do império: Heranças coloniais na literatura portuguesa contemporânea* remains strikingly relevant. Five years on, it remains a work of remarkable intellectual force and enduring resonance. Focusing on Portuguese literature published after 2000, Ferreira examines how the afterlives of Portuguese colonialism shape cultural and literary imaginaries. The book's argument is both conceptually rigorous and politically timely. This is a work that not only deserves attention but demands it.

Patrícia Martinho Ferreira, professor and researcher at Brown University, has published extensively on Lusophone literature and many of the authors discussed here; *Órfãos do império* builds on and deepens that research. Ferreira also engages with recent scholarship, situating her study within ongoing debates about the Portuguese postcolonial condition. Yet her contribution is distinct: by foregrounding the trope of orphanhood, she offers a new lens to understand the emotional, social, and symbolic consequences of the empire's collapse.

The central argument, clearly defined in the introduction, revolves around a corpus of post-2000 literary texts through which Ferreira examines the orphan—both literal and metaphorical—as a figure of difference. Her analysis rests on three interrelated hypotheses. First, the recurring metaphor of the orphan disrupts the imperial rhetoric propagated under the *Estado Novo*, insofar as it arises from the disintegration of family structures. Second, the trope exposes the identitarian anxieties that marked postcolonial Portugal after decolonization and the return of nearly half a million people from the former African colonies. Third, the orphan encapsulates the complexities of a postcolonial society profoundly shaped by its colonial heritage and by a multicultural reality insufficiently acknowledged. These hypotheses guide a nuanced exploration of affective, social, and political dimensions in contemporary Portuguese fiction.

Ferreira's corpus is notable for the balance it strikes between canonical and lesser-known writers. Alongside established figures such as António Lobo Antunes, Lídia Jorge, and Djaimilia Pereira de Almeida, she also brings renewed attention to authors often overlooked by mainstream criticism. This curatorial choice broadens the scope of postcolonial inquiry and challenges critical hierarchies, inviting readers to reconsider the boundaries of the contemporary canon. In this sense, *Órfãos do império* functions not only as literary analysis but also as critical intervention, expanding both the field and its methodological frameworks.

The book opens by outlining its theoretical framework and key definitions, followed by five chapters that trace how orphanhood unfolds across generations and social contexts in twenty-first-century Portuguese literature. Written over two decades after African independence, these novels revisit the memory and postmemory of decolonization and the return of Portuguese *colonos*, reflecting on colonial legacies and intergenerational trauma through the lens of historical hindsight in a *working-through* process. Chapter 1 examines representations of the end of empire and the resulting sense of orphanhood, focusing on Isabela Figueiredo's *Caderno das memórias coloniais* (2009) and *A gorda* (2016), read alongside Paulo Bandeira Faria's *As sete estradinhas de Catete* (2007). Shifting the lens to the experience of return, chapter 2 explores the ambivalent feelings of *olonos-emigrantes* who came back to Portugal, distinguishing postcolonial melancholy from nostalgia. The analysis centers on Aida Gomes's *Os pretos de Pousaflores* (2011), Eduardo Bettencourt Pinto's *A casa das rugas* (2004), and Manuel Acácio's *A balada do ultramar*. Chapter 3 focuses on Margarida Paredes's *O Tibete de África* (2015) and Lídia Jorge's *A noite das mulheres cantoras* (2011), where orphanhood manifests as the helplessness of the first generation of white Portuguese children born in former African colonies. Too young to understand the implications of leaving their birthplace, these children were nonetheless forced to negotiate questions of belonging and homeland in a country reluctant to claim them. Extending this reflection, chapter 4 examines a similar dislocation, experienced as exile, among the *mestizo* first generation. Revisiting *Os pretos de Pousaflores* and *A casa das rugas* from the perspective of *mestizo* children, it also engages Carlos Ferraz's *Basta-me viver* (2010) to explore how mixed heritage complicates narratives of home and identity. Finally, chapter 5 considers how this pervasive sense of orphanhood reverberates in contemporary experiences of Afro-

diasporic communities, as represented in Djaimilia Pereira de Almeida's *Esse cabelo* (2015) and António Lobo Antunes's *O meu nome é Legião* (2007).

Although each chapter highlights key texts, Ferreira's analysis draws on a broad range of Portuguese novels, producing a multifaceted reading of contemporary fiction's engagement with empire, belonging, and intergenerational trauma. Her readings are attentive to affective, cultural, and generational dynamics, resulting in a study that is both nuanced and accessible. Final considerations highlight how the trope of orphanhood illuminates collective identity in its full multiplicity, showing how belonging, difference, and cultural inheritance intersect across generations and resist reduction to simplified collective memory narratives. Conceptually, *Órfãos do império* stands out for its clarity and methodological rigor while opening productive avenues for future research. One might wish for further engagement with Lusophone African perspectives or with the gendered dimensions of postcolonial orphanhood, though these avenues are anticipated in Ferreira's reflections. Within this framework, the often-marginalized maternal figure gains renewed significance, particularly in works by Afro-descendant authors who use motherhood and matrilineal memory to challenge these hierarchies. Although completed before several recent publications, Ferreira's study anticipates insights later developed by writers such as Djaimilia Pereira de Almeida and Aida Gomes, among others, underscoring the book's lasting critical vitality. Contemporary Portuguese society continues to grapple with the legacies of colonialism and a persistent difficulty in addressing them, which underscores the enduring relevance of Ferreira's study.

In sum, Patrícia Martinho Ferreira's *Órfãos do império* is a landmark contribution to Portuguese postcolonial studies, distinguished by its conceptual precision and empathetic critical vision. It intervenes decisively in the canon and field, offering a nuanced understanding of how postcolonial legacies continue to shape contemporary Portuguese literature and society. A work of lasting relevance for scholars, students, and general readers alike, it sets a high standard for future research on the cultural afterlives of empire.

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