

DICIONÁRIO DE HISTORIADORES PORTUGUESES

DA ACADEMIA REAL DAS CIÊNCIAS AO FINAL DO ESTADO NOVO

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FERREIRA, David Mourão- (Lisbon 1927- Lisbon 1996)

The author of *Órfico ofício* [Orphic craft] (poetry, 1978) has a vast body of work as a poet and fiction writer, playwright, essayist and critic, chronicler and poetry translator, alongside a distinguished and respected career as a professor at the Faculdade de Letras de Lisboa [School of Arts and Humanities of Lisbon] (where he graduated in 1951). He was responsible for creating the Literature Theory course (1958). He held management positions and collaborated extensively with journals such as *Távola Redonda* (1950-1954), *Graal* (1956-1957), *Seara Nova*, *Diário Popular* (1954-1957), among others. He was Secretary General of the Sociedade Portuguesa de Autores [Portuguese Society of Authors] (1965-1974), director of the newspaper *A Capital* (1974-1975), Secretary of State for Culture (1976-1979), president of the Associação Portuguesa de Escritores [Portuguese Writers' Association] (1984-1986), director of the Travelling and Permanent Library Service of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (1981-1996) and, at the same foundation, director of the journal *Colóquio-Letras* (1984-1996). These elements (and others listed in the bibliography of his work) already show that he was a personality who early on asserted himself as active and interventionist: alongside his work as a writer and critic, he participated in various aspects of civic and intellectual life, taking on responsibilities that reveal his many facets. His career as a university professor, essayist and critic reveal him to be a highly informed scholar, unconcerned with pursuing an orthodox career: he never obtained a doctorate – but his volumes of criticism and essays are superlative proof of his fruitful, well-informed and tenacious rigour, as recognised by the University, which awarded him the status of visiting professor in 1990. This was well recognised by the many generations of students who benefited from his exemplary teaching between 1957 and 1963, and from 1970 until the end of his life.

His career in criticism and essays began when he was still a student at Colégio Moderno in 1942 (very early, therefore), gaining increasing substance and consistency from the late 1940s onwards, without ever slowing down. A summary of this can be found in the preface dated 1959 to the volume *Vinte poetas contemporâneos* [Twenty Contemporary Poets] (1960, 2nd revised and expanded edition, 1979), consisting in part of articles he had published in *Diário Popular*: in this introduction, he questions the limits of critical practice in the press, and establishes as guidelines 'synthesis' and 'analysis' of texts, following the lessons of Curtius, Croce, Dámaso Alonso, Spitzer and other authors (such as the Russian formalists and Ingarden) to ground a practice governed by a conception of methodological rigour derived from stylistics, but which always remains current. The historical context, which he considers indispensable for understanding the works studied, is

combined with the need for critical work to “have a deep knowledge of linguistic norms and the general aspects of language” in order to “understand and appreciate the specific use that the creator, the poet, makes of them” (p.19). In this 1959 preface, seminal for issues evident throughout his essays, he affirms the importance he believes must be given to tradition (especially national tradition, but not limited to it), both of authors and of structural and formal issues, summarised in the “diachronic consideration of structure and genre”, of themes and motifs, of myths and archetypes, of “connections between the work and social life, cultural history, music, and the visual arts” (p. 20). The historicity of literature is a principle of the utmost importance already in this 1959 preface; in turn, in 1979 (date of the second edition of the 1960 book), he maintains judgements that are perhaps less accurate than those he had previously made, viewing them from the perspective that “Heraclitus’ river also flows through the fields of criticism” (p.25) – in a rare attitude of humility and consistency.

This volume includes the entry (taken from *Motim literário – Ensaio, crítica, polémica* [Literary Mutiny – Essay, Criticism, Polemic] (1962) “Lirismo” [Lyricism], dated 1949 – when David was twenty-two years old – in which he defines this literary mode in terms that follow Paul Valéry: “Lyricism – the development of an exclamation: the attitude of someone who is astonished, admires or notices – before or in – any circumstance, and immediately tends to isolate it, to make it independent and memorable.” (p.79), in accordance with what he designates as “process” (p.81). These are methodological principles that he will always follow: empirical and immediate knowledge must be complemented by study, erecting the stone monument that Horace advocated for the sense of memory and historicity that literature and the arts imply, and to which criticism gives enlightened substance. He will do so, in particular, as he further argues, considering that “the great eras of lyricism”, in a historicist framework of classical origin, “are those in which balance, coherence or proportion is achieved between motifs and technique, between themes and forms”, achieving “harmonious correspondence” between the “elements” (pp.81-82; italics in the text). In 1949, Mourão-Ferreira set out his rigorous conception of lyricism in these terms, evident both in his critical practice as a whole and in his multimodal literary work. In everything he does, he follows these Apollonian principles, remembering tradition but inventing his own voice from it, honed over the years but always close to these roots. His broad and up-to-date knowledge of other literatures and theoretical matrices of his thinking, evident since the 1940s, is perfectly articulated, for example, in *Távola Redonda*, a series of poetry sheets he edited with António Manuel Couto Viana and Luís de Macedo (1950-1954), both in theoretical and critical texts and in poetic collaboration. It should be remembered that this publication gave rise to established names and others who were just starting out, including Alberto de Lacerda (editor of the journal), Sebastião da Gama, Fernanda Botelho and others.

Such practices of openness are also evident in the very important role he played in promoting poetry on various television programmes, notably *Imagens da poesia europeia* [Images of European Poetry] (1969-1974), a broad overview of texts and authors that he translated from the late 1940s onwards, now accessible in the memorable issues 163, 164 and 165 of *Colóquio-Letras* (2003). He translated “from Homer to Ibn Al Sâbûni” (no. 163), “from the ‘Cantilena de Santa Eulália’ to G.G.Byron” (no. 164), “from Charles Baudelaire to Tomás Segovia” (no. 165). He translated (from direct or secondary sources) from Greek and Latin, Anglo-Saxon and Arabic, Hebrew, Old and Modern French, Castilian and Catalan, English, the Nordic and Germanic languages, and Russian. What this undertaking shows is not only the eclecticism of his reading and the trans-

historicity of his references, but also a rigorous critical approach, allowing him to select from sources that are the result of continuous research and the affirmation of a sure taste. In addition, he is part of a lineage of translators and the problematisation of what it means to translate, which is reflected in his essays on a wide variety of poets and fiction writers. For example, Adriano's well-known poem "Animula vagula blandula" is translated by David Mourão-Ferreira as "Alma minha, brandinha, vagabunda, / do corpo acompanhante e moradora, / (...)" (*Colóquio-Letras* no. 163, p.154), which is interesting both for its nod to Camões' sonnet "Alma minha gentil, que te partiste" and for its reference to Marguerite Yourcenar's *Mémoires d'Hadrien* (1951) – an author he would study in his 1988 little book *Marguerite Yourcenar: Retrato de uma voz* [Marguerite Yourcenar: Portrait of a Voice]. The key point to note is the circulation of meaning, sources and knowledge of David Mourão-Ferreira as a critic, translator and omnivorous reader, together with the "harmonious correspondence" already alluded to between recurring themes and motifs, such as vanitas, temporality, death and affections, consolidating a meditation on the human condition that he will never cease to pursue. The anthological purpose will also follow him elsewhere, notably in the three volumes of the series *Portugal – A terra e o homem – Antologia de textos de escritores do século XX* [Portugal – The land and the man – Anthology of texts by 20th-century writers] (1979, under his own name; 1980 and 1981, with Maria Alzira Seixo). Notable for that time is the careful and very open choice of authors and their texts, always presented with succinct and very clear bio-bibliographical notes, constituting a treasure trove of clues that today's reader will follow with benefit. With impeccable rigour in his self-criticism, Mourão-Ferreira does not hesitate to review and evaluate himself, in a gesture that is clearly evident in several prefaces to his essay volumes. This is the case in the "Nota para a 2^a edição de *Vinte poetas contemporâneos*" [Note for the 2nd edition of Twenty Contemporary Poets], from 1979 (1st ed. 1960), or in the "Nota prévia" [Preliminary Note] de 1991 a *Tópicos recuperados: sobre a crítica e outros ensaios* to *Tópicos recuperados: sobre a crítica e outros ensaios* [Recovered Topics: On Criticism and Other Essays] (1992), a volume that recovers not only *Tópicos de crítica e de história literária* [Topics of Criticism and Literary History] (1969), but also essays from *Motim literário* [Literary Mutiny] (1962), *Sobre viventes* [On the Living] (1976) and *Lâmpadas no escuro* [Lamps in the Dark] (1979), to which he adds "two more" texts "unpublished in book form to date". These are "Para uma teoria dos géneros literários" [Towards a theory of literary genres], dated 1948 (when he was only twenty-one years old; published in *Seara Nova*, 1950), and "Comparatismo e extraterritorialidade: Valéry Larbaud" [Comparativism and extraterritoriality: Valéry Larbaud], from 1989. In this period, bringing together texts from his youth and maturity, we once again see the organic way that characterises a way of thinking capable of looking critically at itself as a process, in that "polygonal vision of literature" (title of the 1963 essay, taken from Herculano's view of history) and of himself, which runs transversally through his work. It should be noted that on many occasions the textual subject in the first person manifests himself, declining variations in the effect on his formation and in his taste of the authors to whom he devotes attention, without this implying the slightest slip in the rigour of the analysis he undertakes.

Symptomatic of this same way of conceiving criticism is, in *Tópicos recuperados* [Recovered topics], "António Sérgio, literary critic", bringing together pieces from 1962 and 1975, in which the very length of the excerpts quoted leads to the essays collected in the various volumes by Sérgio, in such a way that David

presents them as highly interesting in terms of how the questions are formulated and the concepts that are explained (e.g., the rejection of biographism). The starting and ending points of this inquiry into Sérgio's steps as a literary critic question in the first person whether Mourão-Ferreira is or is not his disciple, drawing a self-portrait that is ultimately close to that thinker – independence and “seductions of l'école buissonnière” (p.55), an apparently dispersive principle, but ultimately refocusing, in a disciplined centripetal movement that brings the rays back to the main and unifying core: from the margins, one returns to the “same roof” (Sob o mesmo tecto, 1989), to the common home of a way of thinking also supported by António Sérgio. This is the man who was “always against everyone” – “everyone” being the “systems”, “regimes”, “repression” and “persecution” that befell “poets and novelists, scientists and thinkers” (p.57), summarises David, according to whom the author of *Ensaaios* [Essays] “[became] (...) one of the greatest, if not the greatest, prose writers of ideas in our literary history” (p.59).

We have already mentioned the “polygonal” and comprehensive perspective of the critical work of the author of *Hospital das Letras* (1966, 2nd ed. 1982), an issue that is very present in this volume. It is worth noting the apt choice of titles for the successive books, which also extends to the essays, in certain cases paying homage to tradition from the very beginning: while *Motim literário* [Literary Mutiny] (1962) comes from a perhaps unexpected José Agostinho de Macedo, *Hospital das letras* [Hospital of the Letters] quotes the eponymous work by D. Francisco Manuel de Melo, both in the title and in the epigraphs placed at the beginning of each section (seven in total; this structure may be overlooked, as the index does not account for it). In the seventh and last of these, we read this excerpt from the 1657 work that Mourão-Ferreira evokes: “It is necessary to clear the ears of the living, as one clears the eyes of the occupation that has made them famous in the past, so that they may see or hear and esteem the names and fame of the present.” (from “53^a fala de Lípsio” [53rd speech of Lípsio], p.81, 1982 edition). In terms of historical and literary concept, on the one hand, the articulation between past and present is postulated, with lineage being an indispensable mainstay for situating the reading; but on the other hand, a line is drawn here between this book and, within it, the figure of D. Francisco Manuel de Melo, and the volume that would be published in 1976 – *Sobre viventes* [On the Living], a compilation of essays, several of them “written in 1975. More precisely: after 11 March, before 25 November 1975” (as explained in the short and incisive “Preliminary note” on page 11, which should be read by anyone wishing to know David Mourão-Ferreira's political position in the post-Revolution period). Inscription in History, therefore, confrontation with reality, acute awareness that beyond circumstances lies the permanence of literary art and its study – the “living” resist and persist.

Let us return, however, to *Hospital das Letras*: opening section I, we find a chapter from the 1951 degree thesis on Sá de Miranda, followed by texts on the Baroque poet Francisco de Vasconcelos and João Xavier de Matos (both from 1964), and another on Bocage (1965). Section II brings together two highly notable articles from 1962 and 1955 on Garrett, and, under the title “Notes on Cesário Verde”, there are five articles, from 1955, 1954, 1949, 1967 and 1955 – all of them essential critical pieces, with the 1949 article (“Da cidade para o campo” [From the city to the countryside]) being central to the bibliography on the poet of “Cristalizações” [Crystallisations]. If we consider the age of the essayist at the time of publication of these articles, which are now considered classics, his place in the pantheon of Portuguese literature, also as a literary critic, becomes

even greater. In addition to those already mentioned, this volume includes essays on *Orpheu*, Pessoa and Sá-Carneiro, dating from the 1960s. One of these constitutes another cornerstone of the author's critical career: "Ícaro e Dédalo: Mário de Sá-Carneiro e Fernando Pessoa" [Icharus and Dedalus: Mário de Sá-Carneiro and Fernando Pessoa] (published in *Colóquio* in 1964), the text of a "lecture given at the D. Maria II National Theatre (...), during one of the Poetic Afternoons organised by Amélia Rey-Colaço and Natércia Freire" in February 1963 (p. 218). , this text from 1963 was decisive for the critique of Modernism and for the relationship between Pessoa and Sá-Carneiro, mirroring another text that David would publish in issue 117-118 of *Colóquio-Letras*, in 1990, dedicated to the centenary of Mário de Sá-Carneiro: "O voo de Ícaro a partir de Cesário" [The flight of Icharus from Cesário] (pp. 204-212). This dual aspect of David's studies on Sá-Carneiro reveals, on the one hand, his characteristic tendency to return to topics and authors who serve as his guiding light and, on the other, the renewal he always had in mind for his own career as an essayist, highlighting here, twenty-seven years on, what is common to his work in this field: nothing ages, everything is renewed and deepened, in a critical continuum in which the reader is confronted with the evidence of an unblemished rigour in the texts of the 1960s as in those he wrote at the dawn of the 1990s. In the same section of *Hospital das Letras* [Hospital of the Letters] there are two other articles, also from the mid-1960s and equally relevant, on Almada Negreiros, an author to whom he would return on other occasions, and two studies on the Brazilians Cecília Meireles (1975) and Vinícius de Moraes (1956) – in one of the sections of the latter there is a "Parallel with Verlaine – Poetry and phonetics" (pp. 169-173), a very accurate technical analysis and demonstration of the comparative approach that David Mourão-Ferreira always practised with great results, even before the term was established. The book closes with section VII, which brings together essays from the 1960s on contemporary authors (Cabral do Nascimento, José Osório de Oliveira, Tomaz de Figueiredo, Pedro Homem de Mello, Carlos Queiroz – "heir to symbolism" – and Natércia Freire). In short, *Hospital das Letras* is a beacon in the author's work and in the history of criticism in Portugal – knowledgeable, rigorous, innovative, with brilliant and exquisite writing.

In the field of studies on Modernism, particularly on *Orpheu*, Fernando Pessoa and Sá-Carneiro or Almada Negreiros, it is also essential to consider the pieces collected in *Nos passos de Pessoa* [In the Steps of Pessoa] (1988). Manuela Parreira da Silva paid detailed attention to this volume (*Colóquio-Letras* no. 145-146, 1997), emphasising that "the fact that he is a specialist in literature and culture (...) allows him to read [Pessoa] in a unique way. His Pessoa never appears in isolation – he is the link in a chain, a fixer of moments" (p.367), emphasising the issues of lineage and the representation of time. In Fernando Pessoa, according to David, the link between the 16th century and Garrett and Antero stands out, both in terms of themes and motifs and in terms of metres and other technical aspects. If we add to this, as the critic does, Pessoa's links with English and other poets, we see how his perspective on the greatest of the *Orpheus* poets is "polygonal", open but integrative. It is worth recalling the brief preface to the first volume of Pessoa's correspondence with Ophélia Queiroz (*Cartas de amor de Fernando Pessoa*, 1978), in which he recalls Carlos Queiroz's *Homenagem a Fernando Pessoa* [Homage to Fernando Pessoa] (1936) for three reasons: first, the memory of Carlos Queiroz, whose work Mourão-Ferreira does justice to in his essays; second, because it was through the author of *Desaparecido* that the collection of letters came into the possession of our essayist and editor; finally, for the

philological rigour of the criteria used (“As this is a first edition, the original spelling has been scrupulously respected (...); the very irregular way in which Fernando Pessoa dated his letters has also been respected; (...)”, p.9). It is a pioneering gesture that is known to be controversial, as certain reactions have shown, based on a genuine interest in anything that could complement Pessoa’s complexity, looking at it with a lamp in the dark (alluding to the title of the 1979 volume). The knowledge of the work of the poet of “Tabacaria” [Tobacconist’s] is also evident in the anthology *O rosto e as máscaras – Textos escolhidos em verso e prosa* [The Face and the Masks – Selected Texts in Verse and Prose] (chronological anthology, organised and prefaced by David Mourão-Ferreira, 1976, 2nd ed. 1979), proposing a reading framed within the tradition in which the Pessoa universe is inscribed – decadence and symbolism, the nostalgia of *A águia*, etc., all reverting to that matrix of unity and diversity that Jacinto do Prado Coelho had studied, in yet another nod to the concept of the polygon which, as we are seeing, is one of the constant themes in Mourão-Ferreira’s critical work.

No less relevant are the essays on the journal *Presença* and, in particular, on José Régio, concentrated in *Presença da “presença”* (1977). David, himself a mentor of journals such as *Távola Redonda*, a contributor to various periodicals and other publications, shows a relationship with Régio that was not always peaceful, referring to him in critical terms with his usual elevation, while also taking the opportunity, as he did in several other essays, to record moments from his biography – in this case, the audacity of going to meet the poet to “seek to get to know personally a writer he greatly admired” (p.134), noting that the closeness is accentuated by the high regard both held for António Sérgio.

David Mourão-Ferreira approached many other authors throughout his life as a critic, essayist and teacher – suffice it to mention some of those he encouraged his students to read, such as Manuel Teixeira-Gomes, Aquilino Ribeiro, José Rodrigues Miguéis, Vitorino Nemésio, Sebastião da Gama and many other leading poets and fiction writers, all covered in *Sob o mesmo tecto* [Under the Same Roof] (1989), based on the solid course he set out on when he was very young, growing and changing without ever losing sight of his roots. His essays were recognised with numerous awards, including some of the most important in Portugal (Jacinto do Prado Coelho Prize, 1988; APE/PT Grand Prize for Literary Essays, 1990; Career Achievement Award from the Portuguese Society of Authors, 1996, joining the many awards he received for his work as a poet and fiction writer). These distinctions give deserved and well-deserved prominence to this author’s critical work; In this vein is the posthumous tribute by *Colóquio-Letras* (1997): in addition to those already mentioned, we refer to the article by Ernesto Rodrigues on “David verbetista” and that by Vítor Aguiar e Silva, in a very accurate summary of all the essayistic work of David Mourão-Ferreira. Multimodal and always moving, David Mourão-Ferreira’s essays are characterised by a workshop governed by rigour, a love of literature and its thorough study, integrating and illuminating all the facets of a polygon of remarkable scope and supreme importance in the panorama of literary criticism and historiography in Portugal. *Ócios do ofício* [Leisure of the Craft] is the title of his 1989 volume of essays, in which we can read the brilliance of assonances and the awareness that literature has sonic and rhetorical effects on which taste is based, built by craft, that is, by analysis combined with synthesis, by labour that never wanes, but expands and grows, infecting those who read and – if I may use the term – those who revere him as a master.

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