

DICIONÁRIO DE HISTORIADORES PORTUGUESES

DA ACADEMIA REAL DAS CIÊNCIAS AO FINAL DO ESTADO NOVO

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COELHO, Jacinto Almeida do Prado (Lisbon, 1920 – Lisbon, 1984)

Born in Lisbon in 1920, Jacinto Almeida do Prado Coelho was the son of António do Prado Coelho, a high school teacher and essayist. His literary talent was evident from his teenage years. In fact, before he turned 15, he began publishing narratives, poetry and criticism in the *Estudantes de Portugal* [Students of Portugal] magazine in 1935 and 1936. He lived in Lisbon his entire life, where he completed his degree in Romance Philology in 1941 with a thesis titled *A Poesia de Teixeira de Pascoais* [The Poetry of Teixeira de Pascoais]. Under the guidance of Vitorino Nemésio, he boldly chose to present a thesis on a living poet. The book was published in 1945 and included a short poetic anthology by the author of *Marânus*. Prior to that, in 1943, he presented the critical-pedagogical essay *A Educação do Sentimento Poético* [The Education of Poetic Sentiment], published the following year. In this work, he reveals one of the strengths of his teaching and essay writing: a pedagogical concern. Rather than focusing on didactics, he emphasises educational work — the "living culture" — believing that poetry should play a key role in the education of young people. He also advocates for "lifelong self-education" among teachers, asserting that without this, educators cannot fulfil what truly matters: being genuine humanists.

In 1943, Jacinto do Prado Coelho was invited to become an assistant professor. He received his PhD in 1947 with a thesis titled *Introdução ao Estudo da Novela Camiliana* [Introduction to the Study of Camilo Castelo Branco's Novels], published the previous year. This refreshing and comprehensive work has become a classic in Camillian studies. Aiming to "see how the Camillian novel materialises, grows and transforms", he emphasises the importance of "understanding the biographical circumstances" that shed light on the novel's origins, meaning and the author's originality. As a tribute to his father, a distinguished Camillianist, the work showcases the confidence, rigour, and extensive knowledge of a researcher who, at just 27, had thoroughly mastered the extensive work of the author of *Amor de Perdição* [Love of Perdition], as well as Camilo's dialogical relationships with both national and international classic and contemporary authors. In 1951, in the competition for extraordinary professor, he presented a pioneering study for the first time at a Portuguese university: *Diversidade e Unidade em Fernando Pessoa* [Diversity and Unity in Fernando Pessoa], published that same year, when a substantial portion of Pessoa's work was still unknown. Due to its theoretical depth



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and refined style analysis — akin to the approaches of Leo Spitzer or Dámaso Alonso — the methodology employed was rooted in the criticism that he consistently favoured; an approach that remains a significant component of the extensive bibliography dedicated to the poet of the heteronyms. In 1953, at the age of 33, Jacinto do Prado Coelho reached the pinnacle of his academic career, working as a full professor of Modern Portuguese Literature for 30 years until his untimely death.

Although his work and interests spanned other literatures, cultures, and historical periods — including subjects such as philology, linguistics, comparative literature, and the sociology of literature — Jacinto do Prado Coelho consistently prioritised Portuguese literature from the 18th to the 20th centuries, often revisiting the authors featured in his major works. This is evident from 1965 onwards, with the publication of the *Works of Camilo Castelo Branco*, the organisation of the *Complete Works of Teixeira de Pascoais* (which remained unfinished due to circumstances beyond his control), and several editions of Pessoa's unpublished works, including *Livro do Desassossego* [The Book of Disquiet] in 1982.

He planned and led the *Dicionário das Literaturas Portuguesa, Galega e Brasileira* [Dictionary of Portuguese, Galician and Brazilian Literatures], which was initially published in fascicles in 1956 and later as a complete volume in 1960. Aiming to achieve "a more perfect awareness of the cultural unity among the three Portuguese-speaking peoples," this pioneering work adopted a distinctly historico-literary approach. It was later re-edited and expanded to include numerous entries by him. In the second two-volume edition, published in 1971, the scope of this essential work was broadened to include literary stylistics and increased attention to Brazilian literature. Following the Carnation Revolution on 25 April 1974, Jacinto do Prado Coelho embarked on a comprehensive revision of the dictionary, inviting new collaborators to contribute to the project. Although he was unable to complete it before his death in 1984, the work was well advanced. After a few delays, it was completed in the early 21st century with the release of three updated volumes, which notably included Portuguese-speaking African literature, with Ernesto Rodrigues coordinating Portuguese literature and Pires Laranjeira overseeing Brazilian and African literatures.

In 1961, he published a collection of essays titled *Problemática da História Literária* [Issues in Literary History], which includes articles of various types, covering a period of more than four centuries. In the preface to the revised and expanded second edition, Jacinto do Prado Coelho reflects broadly and acknowledges his own shortcomings regarding the theoretical and methodological approaches he has adopted throughout his career: "I have been, amateurishly, a historian of culture, a biographer, a psychologist; I have dedicated myself to immediate criticism (which is inevitably impressionistic or intuitive) and I have even done impressionism outside literary criticism." Bridging the literary tradition envisioned by Romanticism and the multiple 20th-century theories — such as stylistics, new criticism, Russian formalism, structuralism, and semiotics — all of which prioritised the verbal nature of literature, he is mindful of reception aesthetics, particularly Jauss's focus on the relationship between the work and the reader. He concludes that different levels and approaches can be integrated into a "global project for the study of literature". In this project, criticism merges with history, and



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synchrony aligns with diachrony. The critic, motivated by a love of literature and an enduring desire to deepen their understanding, must also recognise the limitations and inherent fragility of their work.

Two other essay collections followed: *A Letra e o Leitor* [The Letter and the Reader] in 1969, and *Ao Contrário de Penélope* [Unlike Penelope] in 1976. In the first volume, which includes over twenty studies on authors from Camões to contemporary poetry, he proposes that "the true act of criticism requires a combination of intuition, reflection, and analysis," with varying proportions of these elements depending on whether the approach is more rationalist or more subjectivist. Acknowledging that the collected texts reflect "a restless search, and therefore an evolution", he acknowledges that his greatest desire has always been to "envelop the literary work", attempting to capture it within a network of relationships. In the second collection, published during a time of democracy, Jacinto do Prado Coelho uses the allegory of Penelope and her web, unravelled every night to the despair of her suitors, to highlight the contrast between the faithfulness of Ulysses' wife and the unfaithfulness of the critic, who incessantly seeks literature, aiming to uncover what endures over time, thereby adding meaning to the works and creating a web that "is neither a disguise nor a trick: it is a testament, a gift." This is followed by a very important reflection on the teaching of literature and over thirty essays on authors and works from the 19th and 20th centuries. The elegance and clarity of his style bear witness to the pedagogical concern present throughout his vast and diverse career.

In the foreword to his last published volume, *Camões e Pessoa, Poetas da Utopia* [Camões and Pessoa, Poets of Utopia], in 1983, he presents a personal reflection on utopia and myth, emphasising that "literature is the quintessential space of utopia," which is why it is often not favoured by established powers, who fear its subversive nature. In his own words, he provides an overview and spiritual testament to his motivations: "I write out of a need to escape, to see more clearly, to extend the practice of reading, to connect with others, to replace life, to feel alive." Most of the essays in the book focus on the two foremost poets in the Portuguese canon, with the remainder devoted to individual studies of Portuguese and Brazilian authors.

Jacinto do Prado Coelho served as the Director of the Centre for Philological Studies from 1954 to 1965. He became a corresponding member of the Lisbon Academy of Sciences in 1955 and an effective member in 1962, eventually chairing its Classe de Letras (humanities branch). Additionally, he was the president of the Portuguese Writers' Society until it was dissolved by Salazarism in 1965, shortly after Luandino Vieira, an Angolan writer, received the Literature Prize. This episode reveals an important facet of Jacinto do Prado Coelho's sense of citizenship: his quiet yet resolute opposition to the dictatorship, which became evident during the academic crisis of 1962. Co-director and, from 1971, director of the journal *Colóquio - Letras* at the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, his international prestige as a critic and researcher was consolidated from the 1950s onwards due to his regular participation in high-level scientific meetings and publications in renowned international journals. He was a member of the Brazilian Academy of Letters, the Royal Galician Academy, the Hispanic Society of America, the Association Internationale de Littérature Comparée and a founding member of the Portuguese PEN Clube, among other national and international cultural institutions.



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He also served as vice-president of the Association Internationale des Critiques Littéraires, which he led at its Portuguese Centre.

Alongside university teaching, Jacinto do Prado Coelho held significant positions in academia. Notably, after the establishment of democracy, he served as president of the Scientific Council of the Faculty of Arts and Humanities of the University of Lisbon, where he played an active role in restructuring the Romance Philology courses. After the Carnation Revolution of 25 April 1974, which he celebrated as "a revolution-fest", he founded CLEPUL — the Centre for Lusophone Literatures of the University of Lisbon, with the aim of promoting research and fostering innovative knowledge about the literary and cultural expressions of Portuguese-speaking countries. Under his leadership, CLEPUL focused on Camillian studies, Brazilian literature, the diverse literatures of Portuguese-speaking African countries, and the sociology of literature.

His students at the Faculty of Arts and Humanities included David Mourão-Ferreira, Urbano Tavares Rodrigues, Maria Alzira Seixo and Maria de Lourdes A. Ferraz. At a colloquium held in his honor in 1996, organised by Nova University of Lisbon, his only son, Eduardo Prado Coelho — himself a university professor and writer — described Jacinto do Prado Coelho as "a sceptic, a rationalist, a humanist, with great openness to difference and novelty." This is undoubtedly one of his greatest legacies to Portuguese culture.

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