

Ana Paula Ferreira (ed). *A Urgência de Contar: Contos de Mulheres dos Anos 40*. Lisboa: Caminho, 2000.

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The publication of *A Urgência de Contar: Contos de Mulheres dos Anos 40*, by Ana Paula Ferreira, is representative of the author's dedication to the phenomenon of the rise of the "woman writer" in Portugal during the Estado Novo and in particular during the 1940s. The anthology brings together the works of fifteen women authors who, for the most part, have been widely neglected by the critical establishment of Portuguese literature. Alongside the unquestionable merit of making these works accessible to a broader public, the anthology provides a succinct yet thorough contextualization of the corpus and an in-depth reading of the socio-political factors that influenced the themes and the experience inherent in these women's writing. As such, the book aims to bridge a gap in Portuguese literary criticism concerning literature written by women, and further opens the way for a much-needed social history of women writers in Portugal.

*A Urgência de Contar* consists of a substantial introduction, eighteen short stories that constitute the main corpus of the anthology, followed by a valuable appendix that includes a list of twenty-six women writers who published fiction in the 1940s, a list of short stories and short novellas published in the 1940s, and concise, informative bio-bibliographic notes on each of the fifteen authors included in the volume.

Ana Paula Ferreira's introduction to the texts in this volume addresses the question of the blatant absence of women from literary criticism of the 1940s. With the exception of Paula Morão's pioneering work on Irene Lisboa, the general silence of literary critics in regard to the work of women from this period is all the more unjustifiable given the fact that, as Ferreira amply discusses, from the end of the 1930s to the end of the 1940s there is the first important wave of female authors in Portuguese literature, comparable only to the emergence of women writers in the later part of the 1970s following the overturn of the Fascist regime. Ferreira suggests that, in part, the lack of academic perspectives centered on the category of "women writers" stems from the fact that this literature is marginalized and marked as "feminine literature," entailing a lack of cultural and literary credibility. After a

brief introduction to the engendered notion of literary acceptance and status, Ferreira continues with a more detailed analysis of the situation of these Portuguese women. Her analysis approaches the different generations of writers from the 1920s through the 1940s yet without collapsing the authors into indistinct groups.

Ferreira begins by drawing attention to the women writers under the First Republic, many of whom were also translators, journalists and publicists whose works centered on the “woman question,” and as such were also often affiliated with the Conselho Nacional das Mulheres Portuguesas, a national organization dedicated to women’s issues. Some of the literary tendencies of this first group of writers can be characterized as neo-romantic, and even melodramatic, at times coupled with moralist penchants.

Female writers of the second group that Ferreira discusses are the new voices appearing in the second part of the 1930s. Among these women are writers such as Irene Lisboa, Maria Lamas, Alice Ogando, Rachel Bastos and Maria Archer, many of whom began writing poetry before turning to prose fiction. Ferreira emphasizes in particular the work of Maria Archer and the themes that are characteristic of her writing.

The third and most important group of women writers for the anthology under study corresponds to the female authors who published novels and short stories during the 1940s. Ferreira couches her presentation of this generational group in the sense of community that binds these women around the weight of cultural, moral and socio-economic injustices. From this group of prolific women, for the most part completely forgotten nowadays up unto the publication of this volume, only two women writers became widely acknowledged authors: Natália Correia and Agustina Bessa Luís.

After having mapped the general lines of the woman writer’s experience during the first decades of the Estado Novo, Ferreira further develops the socio-historical and literary contexts of these writers in relation to the overtly masculinist Neo-Realist movement and the position of women in Portuguese society at the time. In particular, Ferreira engages with the critical work of João Gaspar Simões and his discussion of literature as “high culture” in relation to the status of women. What is also certainly admirable is Ferreira’s discussion of writers in Portugal in light of other European writers and critics. As such, Ferreira succeeds in placing the Portuguese women writer’s impasse within a wider socio-cultural perspective, foregrounding the condition of professional women around the general notion of “feminine literature.”

Given the fact that this anthology is a collection of short stories written by women in the 1940s, Ferreira pertinently discusses the criteria for working with this literary genre, as well as the writers' possible preference for the short story. As the organizer of this book states, the texts included in this anthology are meant to be considered as a representative sample of the fiction by women of this period and their political, social and ideological preoccupations. Particularly noteworthy is the fact that the organization of the stories included in this anthology was planned and carried out with extreme care. The criteria for both the inclusion and order of the short stories is detailed in the organizer's introduction, making the corpus as a whole even more coherent and emblematic.

As the title indicates, Ana Paula Ferreira's work resurrects the urgency of the messages of these mostly forgotten women authors and is in and of itself a much-overdue critical statement in Portuguese literary studies. This urgency, both then and now, points to the ongoing women's question and in particular to the place of women in literary traditions. More than half a century later, Ferreira's research makes a symbolic stand and opens up the field for further research in this area. Given the fact that gender studies are only just developing in Portugal, this project was without doubt as urgent as it was challenging. The depth of Ferreira's research is visible in the thorough introduction to the present anthology and pertinent related themes, the inclusion of valuable explanatory notes, important bibliography and further reading suggestions, as well as the coherently organized corpus, combining all the necessary conditions for these women's voices to at last be heard.

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