

Margarida Calafate Ribeiro and Ana Paula Ferreira, eds.
Fantasmata e Fantasias Imperiais no Imaginário Português Contemporâneo. Porto: Campo das Letras, 2003.

Claire Williams

This extremely important and varied collection of essays includes papers presented at two interdisciplinary conferences that were held at King's College London in 2000 and 2001 as part of a series on European identities and former empires. Although excluded from Said's canonical texts, like the Spanish empire, the Portuguese empire was one of the most interesting and unusual, not least because the Portuguese penetrated first and furthest into new territories and wrote detailed accounts of their travels and encounters. Due above all to the language barrier, Portuguese colonial and postcolonial experiences and materials have been neglected by international critics and theorists dealing with globalisation and empire, apart, maybe, from in the works of Boaventura de Sousa Santos, Maria Alzira Seixo, and Paulo de Medeiros.

The processes of winning, managing, defending, and finally losing their sovereignty in far-flung territories marked the Portuguese sense of national and personal identity irreparably, as the fifteen essays in this collection show. They (psycho)analyse the relics and ghosts haunting contemporary literature and the visual arts, history and philosophy, historiography and anthropology, memoirs and travel narratives. The strength of the collection is in its variety, its attention to all the corners of the former empire (in Africa, Asia, and South America) and the use of postcolonial theories to reveal and confront the dreams lost and traumas exposed, especially by the colonial wars and the events of the immediate post-Revolutionary period. References in the introduction and the chapters themselves remind the reader how the lost empire constantly resurfaces in public events such as the 1998 Lisbon Expo and the 2000 commemorations of 500 years since the "discovery" of Brazil.

The impressive list of essayists is composed of experts in the area from Europe and the United States, and well-known and highly esteemed members of Portuguese academic circles. Some of the contributors (Lisboa, Sousa

Rebelo, Medeiros, Brookshaw, Owen, Rothwell, Bastos) draw conclusions from close readings of one text, writer or artist; others use the evidence of several texts to consider a common concept (Ribeiro, Bethencourt, Vecchi, Jackson, Vakil); and others work at a more theoretical level (Lourenço, Labanyi). The excellent introduction, in particular, provides an extremely useful history (and bibliography) of the evolution of postcolonial theory in Portugal, suggesting ways of moving forward rather than dwelling on the past and what has been lost.

One aspect that recurs in several chapters is the misogyny of empire and the strategies used by women writers such as Lídia Jorge (Medeiros), Maria Ondina Braga (Brookshaw), and Teolinda Gersão (Owen), and the painter Paula Rego (Bethencourt, Lisboa) to highlight and criticise it. The focus of such artists on the domestic as a microcosm of the nation, as well as the recourse to nostalgia by means of pseudo-autobiographical narratives/images are further tools by which they comment on the inequalities of the colonial system.

Several of the critics employ psychoanalytic theory in their approaches to the Portuguese experience of the loss of empire and how it surfaces in the contemporary “imaginary” mentioned in the title. Vecchi, for example, believes that there is a need to find symbolic “bodies” in order that mourning, and subsequently closure, can take place. The essays in this volume exemplify the quantity, variety, and complexity of existing material and will surely trigger further research into the area within and outside Portugal and, by discovering and analysing the ghosts and fantasies of empire, help lay them to rest.

Claire Williams is University Lecturer in Brazilian Literature and Culture at Oxford University. A fellow of St Peter's College, she is author of *The Encounter between Opposites in the Works of Clarice Lispector*. Email: claire.williams@mod-langs.ox.ac.uk