

**Manuel Frias Martins. *In Theory/Em teoria*. Ambar, Porto: Ambar, 2003.**

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It is very unusual to come across a book such as *In Theory/Em teoria*. Easily identifiable through its extra-literary features (its format, for instance), Manuel Frias Martins's newest collection of essays on literary theory and criticism stands out in the Portuguese publishing mainstream because of the fact that it is a bilingual edition. Even in this respect it does not conform to the expected Portuguese and English versions of the same essays; rather, it presents a series of essays that are familiar in the subjects discussed but which are organized independently of one another.

As the quotations from Pessoa aptly indicate at the beginning ("O pacto bilingue/The bilingual pact" 13), the very structure of the book reflects the centrality of English, the new Latin, in today's academia. The first part of the book ("Em teoria (a literatura)" 17-173) is a collection of six essays on theoretical topics in contemporary literary studies that, although not ignored in Portugal, are usually not thought out in close relation to the current state of the art in the English-speaking world. Literary theory and literary criticism, literature and its notions (say, allegory), literary conventions and translation, all of these have competent essayists in Portugal if we consider French and even German influences.

Manuel Frias Martins, in this respect, succeeds in establishing a landmark by introducing a number of authors, works and concepts current in the Anglo-American world to Portuguese academia, where their influence was (and still is) most frequently restricted to very short essays or very lengthy dissertations. Martins's own previous work, especially his PhD-based *Matéria Negra* (1995), can be mentioned as one good, indeed excellent, example of this phenomenon. Certainly not by chance, *In Theory* is dedicated to students—who are, after all, those most attuned with English language and culture in today's Portugal.

Overlapping this broadening of horizons in Portuguese literary theory, the book's second part ("In theory (literature)" 177-285) features seven essays, all

related to the major English debates of not only literary theory but also cultural studies. It is noteworthy that in Portuguese universities the surge of cultural studies (and of multiculturalism, gender studies, colonial studies, etc.) is due not so much to the evolution of literary studies as to its immobility, leaving the field open to sociology, politics, communication studies and, lately, even history (which, if one is acquainted with the Portuguese practice of history, is indeed even more remarkable). Manuel Frias Martins, in his turn, has no need to depart from his discipline or, in fact, from the positions he has already taken in previous works (such as the privileged place assigned to literary aesthetic experience or the interest in theory as a hermeneutical tool to explore the critical unconscious of the literary text, prior to any criticism).

In fact, he introduces himself as an author into the debates of the English-speaking world, bringing with him the works of other Portuguese authors (in a quite liberal array, from Saramago to Alfredo Margarido, and from Pedro Barbosa to Alberto Pimenta. Plus the poets: Pessoa, obviously, Eugénio de Andrade, Herberto Helder, and others). In doing so, his original—and still faithful—relationship with Russian formalism branches out towards the *topoi* of today's literary theory: the canon and the literature curriculum (not by chance, Frias Martins is one the most knowledgeable Portuguese academics on Harold Bloom), cyberculture, globalization. To those interested in an appraisal of his positions, two suggestions may be valuable: concerning the recent past of literary studies in Portugal, Frias Martins's singular defense of humanism is very relevant; as for his relation with English-language discussions, note his approach to criticism and ethics, which is not completely new yet at the same time is not at all common.

So much with respect to this review, for additional praise should be, at this point, unnecessary; any objections would require far too much room to be properly stated (I am thinking of the references to Nietzsche in particular). The fact of the matter is that this book was designed to overcome the barriers that have limited an author of Pessoa's magnitude to the Portuguese language for so many decades. And it succeeds in doing so. Despite all of the significant changes in the Portuguese public sphere and in the academic world in general, this is no small achievement. Deservedly, it is Manuel Frias Martins's first significant landmark in "the Latin of the wider world."

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