

*Portugal heute. Politik. Wirtschaft. Kultur.* Edited by Dietrich Briesemeister and Axel Schönberger. *Bibliotheca Ibero-Americana* Vol. 64. Frankfurt a.M.: Vervuert Verlag, 1997.

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The nearly one thousand-page volume edited by Dietrich Briesemeister and Axel Schönberger is both a *tour de force* and one of the most important manuals for students and researchers in Portuguese Studies today. As the editors rightly claim in their introduction, this is the first work to attempt such a broad overview of twentieth-century Portugal. Before actually referring to its contents, I think that a bit of contextualization might help to place this volume and assess its significant contribution. The tradition of German scholarship on Portuguese Studies is long and distinguished. Names like those of Friedrich Bouterwerk, Carolina Michaëllis, or Wolfgang Kayser have long been recognized as fundamental for any understanding of the field. More recently, a series of publications has attested to a renewed vitality of Portuguese Studies in Germany which, in spite of institutional shortcomings, has been expanding exponentially. This development is all the more remarkable considering that the interest of most German Lusitanists in the literature and culture of Portugal and other lusophone areas is less than officially recognized—suffice it to say that the only Chair in Portuguese Studies, at Trier, was just inaugurated a few years ago with the nomination of Henry Thorau. A new interest in matters Portuguese can be attributed to a variety of factors ranging from the end of the colonial wars and the resulting international isolation of Portugal to the integration of Portugal in the European Union. But all too often the image of Portugal still tends to oscillate between that of a cheap vacation paradise to that of an exotic place within Europe's borders—indeed, the designation of Portugal as border, frontier, or margin, appears over and over again in varied publications geared to the public at large or even the educated middle classes. Thus, a special issue of the Swiss cultural magazine *Du* on Lisbon as a literary city still was entitled "The Center at the Margin" ("Zentrum am Rand," Vol. 9, 1996).

In this last decade, however, German scholarly works have contributed greatly to disperse such romanticized idealizations of Portugal and Portuguese culture. Among these, the following deserve special mention: two volumes of essays edited by Rainer Hess on the contemporary Portuguese novel

(*Portugiesische Romane der Gegenwart: Interpretationen*, 1992, and *Portugiesische Romane der Gegenwart: Neue Interpretationen*, 1993) as well as one book edited by Elfriede Engelmayer and Renate Heß on contemporary women writers (*Die Schwestern der Mariana Alcoforado. Portugiesische Schriftstellerinnen der Gegenwart*, 1993); and also Gesa Hasebrink's Ph.D. dissertation on post-1974 novels, *Wege der Erneuerung. Portugiesische Romane nach der "Nelkenrevolution"* (Berlin: Tranvía, 1993). Scant distribution even within Germany, however, certainly limited the reception of these works by a non-academic public. But this should no longer be a problem. Coinciding with the 1997 Frankfurt Book Fair, which featured Portugal as a special theme, the prestigious publisher Suhrkamp issued as a pocket book a collection of essays edited by Henry Thorau on *Portugiesische Literatur*. This volume, which gathers a collection of important essays by distinguished Portuguese and German scholars, is undoubtedly the best concise and rigorous introduction to twentieth-century Portuguese literature currently available in any language. Indeed, even the excellent volume on *After the Revolution: Twenty Years of Portuguese Literature, 1974-1994*, edited by Helena Kaufman and Anna Klobucka also in 1997, appears far more uneven in comparison.

Even a few years ago, the literary scholar with little or no Portuguese who might have wanted to check Portuguese literature would still be confronted by an almost complete lack of materials; however, this is clearly no longer the case. The works just mentioned all make important contributions for Portuguese Studies and also for comparatists and students in general. What had been lacking still was a rigorous and broad approach to contextual aspects such as social and economic developments. With the publication in 1998 of *Modern Portugal*, edited by António Costa Pinto (see the review by Michael Baum in the previous issue of *Portuguese Literary & Cultural Studies*), a significant step was taken to redress that shortcoming. And with the publication of *Portugal heute* the international scholarly community and students (at least those with reading knowledge of German) have also gained an indispensable tool for study and research.

The editors explicitly refer to *Portugal Today* as a reference work that does not pretend to be encyclopedic. Its subject matter, implied in the title, is contemporary Portugal, even though in some articles, by necessity, the authors must also refer to historic material. This is especially evident in one article by Axel Schönberg, who attempts to trace with large brushstrokes the most important points in Portugal's history up to 1974 (119-58). Thus, essays of

varying length over a large number of topics have been assembled, and while some treat their subject matter in general terms, others assume a much more specialized perspective on a limited topic. Obviously, as with any such enterprise, there are differences from article to article, although the quality of them all is quite even. Another exemplary trait is the clarity and sobriety of all the articles. The dissemination of information and not polemics rightly guides the authors. The book is divided into four thematic parts: economy, land, and population; history, state, politics, society, and religion; language, culture, education, and science; and cultural relations between Portugal and Germany. Among the forty-seven articles, nine are signed by Briesemeister and two by Schönberg themselves. A constant in all articles is the inclusion of selected bibliographic lists which, with few exceptions, already would make the volume quite valuable inasmuch as they provide easy access to sources in a variety of disciplines and thus facilitate further interdisciplinary inquiries. Of the four parts, the most extensive is the one on language, culture, education and science, which by itself accounts for over half of all the articles. Indeed, it is here that one finds essays on linguistic and specific cultural topics as well as overviews of literary genres. As such, this is also the most uneven of all sections, for it mixes not only highly divergent topics such as the "Acordo Ortográfico" (429-60), Fernando Pessoa (561-76), and "Fado" (673-98), but it also includes long articles such as the one on peculiarities of Brazilian Portuguese (365-90) and very short ones like the one on Portuguese architecture (699-704). And, of course, there are inevitable repetitions that the editors account for as facilitating the comprehension of individual essays. These are common constraints of edited volumes, and this one, in comparison with others, seems to have successfully achieved a good balance. Indeed, it is doubtful that any readers will actually read this volume from cover to cover. More likely they will use it selectively to look for information on a given topic, something at which the volume excels. If there is any complaint to be voiced, it is simply the desire to have a CD-ROM version of this book that would provide convenient access to the information.

One could quibble with organizational decisions, but that is not my intention. For instance, the nine articles on linguistic aspects could well have formed a separate, formal division. After all, that is also the number of articles in the last part on the cultural relations between Portugal and Germany, which appears more coherent than the much larger part on language, culture, education, and science. What interests me, however, is the way this book begs

for a consideration of the field of Portuguese Studies. The editors defend the gaps in the volume by saying that they necessarily reflect the way the discipline is practiced in Germany, and this argument is both credible and critical. Take, for instance, the large section of the book on cultural relations. It is obviously of more restricted interest than the others because it more specifically reflects the country of origin (or at least the linguistic space) of the book and its intended primary audience. Especially the article on German Studies in Portugal might even appear to exceed the purposes of strict information about contemporary Portugal, yet it is a readily understandable and very pertinent chapter. On the whole, even though these chapters by themselves are also of general interest for an understanding of Portugal, one can well imagine that if the book were produced, say, in the United States, it would be replaced by others either geared to a Luso-American audience or reflecting the relations between the United States and Portugal.

Another point of contention pertains to the way in which literature has been treated in this volume. Understandably, given the wide scope of the volume (and even perhaps reflecting the fact that the volume edited by Henry Thorau had just been published), the chapters on literature are focused either too specifically or too broadly on genre. Still, one wonders why there is one article on the post-1974 novel in Portugal, two on theater—one on theater in general, the other on post-1974 drama—one on lyrical poetry post-1974, and one on Pessoa. One can think of all kinds of reasons for such a choice, like the desire to concentrate on developments after the Revolution, to present more facts about theater since this genre has had less critical attention in general, and even to trace the indelible influence of Pessoa in this century. But why is there no mention of other genres like the short story, the essay, epistolography, or diaries? Why a chapter on Pessoa but none on Saramago, whose importance even before the Nobel prize was clearly recognized and who enjoys wide reception in Germany? Obviously, these questions are not so much directed only at the book in question but to the way the field of Portuguese Studies is conceived—or better, to the way that no consideration is given to what Portuguese Studies in theory, or even in practice, is or should be.

The gaps, in other words, might not just be a reflection of Portuguese Studies in Germany. Rather, they may be symptomatic of wider methodological gaps in the field at large. At least, for this reader, it is very interesting and pertinent that the volume opens with one large introductory essay on economics and another on population issues, and it is gratifying to

see these subject matters considered together with historical, political and literary issues. Likewise, having chapters on philosophy (759-80), cinema (637-52), the internet (653-62), and archives and libraries (741-48) in Portugal points to a wider consideration of Portuguese Studies besides providing very pertinent information. And yet, one can only wonder why there is no consideration of feminist studies in Portugal, the position of women in Portuguese society, or the roles of television (besides the brief considerations in the short article on modern media, (627-35), and advertising. Clearly, in a volume of this nature, cultural items are included because of the need to transmit to students certain key elements of Portuguese society beyond the strictly historical and literary. And my questions are not meant to indicate any shortcoming of the book in itself. Rather, besides offering us an extremely useful and important reference work, Briesemeister and Schönberg also make explicit how much Portuguese Studies needs a serious consideration of its goals, methods, and practices. That the editors do not attempt to do so in an introduction or preface is quite understandable, as they would inevitably exceed the already quite broad parameters of the present publication. And although the questions will remain with all of us committed to the development of Portuguese Studies in the meantime, we have one more indispensable tool. The present volume should not only be in all institutional libraries, but with its affordable price, it should also find a place on our shelves as well.