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Hélio ALVES, *Tempo para entender. História comparada da literatura portuguesa*

Casal de Cambra (Portugal), Caleidoscópio Edição e Artes Gráficas

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REFERENCES

Hélio ALVES, *Tempo para entender. História comparada da literatura portuguesa*, Casal de Cambra (Portugal), Caleidoscópico Edição e Artes Gráficas, 2006, 201 p., ISBN13: 9-789898-010230.

- 1 In the opening chapter, “História Literária”, Hélio Alves discusses the rationale behind his work. Fundamentally, this project presents an alternative to the traditional understanding of “Portuguese literature”. It seeks to deconstruct and replace established criteria of evaluation. Literary production should not be selected and viewed from a nationalistic standpoint. Instead, it should be selected according to its creativity and significance in bringing about innovation to humankind. History should not appropriate literature but reap its fruits. From this standpoint the author rethinks key figures in the history of Portuguese literature.
- 2 This re-evaluation of the Portuguese literature in a wider context revisits generally accepted literary periods under the headings “*Fim do Medievo*”, “*Renascimento*”, “*Modernidade*” and “*Revoluções*”. In the process the author debates the hegemonic status currently enjoyed by literature written in the English language, and seeks to demonstrate that Portugal has literary figures of comparable international stature. “*Fim do Medievo*” is a chapter that focuses mainly on Gil Vicente and Bernardim Ribeiro. Cataldo Sículo and Damião de Góis are given prominence in “*Renascimento*”. Other figures are considered, including Luís de Camões. Vasco Mouzinho is at the centre of

“*Modernidade*” in an argument that raises him above Shakespeare. Camilo and António Nobre are the Portuguese writers highlighted in the last chapter, “*Revoluções*”.

- 3 Most chapters are adapted versions of previous works. This has a positive and negative effect. On the one hand, each essay offers a thorough analysis of its own topic. On the other, the different original orientation subjacent to each essay does not support good coordination between chapters. This is not a major problem but an enhancing solution could be found in the addition of a concluding chapter in which the author would bring loose ends together.
- 4 A controversial aspect of this history of Portuguese literature is the inclusion of literary production which is not necessarily written in Portuguese. Cataldo Sículo is selected through his poem “*Arcitinge*”, on the Portuguese maritime expansion but written in Latin. Probably anticipating criticism, the author justifies this choice in terms of the rationale underpinning his work. In the introductory chapter, “*História Literária*”, under subtitle “*Como se escreve esta história*”, it is explained that the migratory essence of the literary act calls for freedom from “central points” and “peripheries”, which disables nation and language as delimitating criteria.
- 5 *Tempo para entender* carries a political message. In response to cultural colonization, in particular from the Anglophone world, Hélio Alves proposes the deconstruction of a nation-centred perspective and its replacement with a broader outlook that will show the world the true stature of some Portuguese literary figures that up to now have been underestimated or virtually ignored. This is an interesting work that provides new food for thought. As its title aptly points out, it is “time to understand”. Anyone studying Portuguese literature should take the opportunity to do so.

September 2007