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HOMENAGEM A
IRENE RAMALHO SANTOS

THE EDGE OF ONE OF MANY CIRCLES

ISABEL CALDEIRA
GRAÇA CAPINHA
JACINTA MATOS
ORGANIZAÇÃO

Trata-se de um volume de homenagem à Prof. Doutora Irene Ramalho Santos, reunindo artigos na sua maior parte de consagrados/as especialistas nas diversas áreas – estudos anglo-americanos; estudos comparados; poética; estudos feministas; estudos pessoais –, para além de uma secção com poemas de poetas de várias nacionalidades, que estiveram presentes nos Encontros Internacionais de Poetas, organizados pelos Estudos Anglo-Americanos da Faculdade de Letras da UC., e de uma secção de testemunhos em honra da homenageada.



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VOL. I

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P R E F A C E

This volume in honour of Maria Irene Ramalho de Sousa Santos (organized by the Anglo-American Section [SEAA] of the Department of Languages, Literatures and Cultures, Faculty of Letters, University of Coimbra) gathers, from Portugal and abroad, the contributions of colleagues, ex-students and friends who wish to pay tribute to Irene's extraordinary career and to express how much they owe her as a teacher, scholar and mentor, and as a devoted and generous friend. The diversity and depth of her academic interests, of which her CV provides eloquent proof, amply justify the regard and admiration she enjoys in her own country and elsewhere. Her high academic standards, both as a teacher and researcher, and the rigour and exigence she unfailingly brings to her work have made an indelible mark on all those who have had the privilege to learn from her.

Irene Ramalho Santos (or, for most of us, Maria Irene Ramalho or simply and affectionately MIR) was the first holder of a PhD in American Studies in Portugal. She was – and still is today – responsible for the supervision of most of our postgraduates in American Studies. When she came back from the US in 1973, with her PhD from Yale University, Maria Irene pioneered new pedagogies in the then very conservative area of Germanic Philological Studies at the University of Coimbra. Her students of American Literature and Culture fondly remember her critical mode of approach to texts (and to life), and the space she gave them to pursue autonomous and

creative thought in an atmosphere of close and interested proximity. In the field of North-American Literature she was distinguished by the innovative content of her courses and new teaching methods. In the turbulent times after the 1974 Revolution, the American literature seminar she taught for students in the final two years of their degree created new dynamics of learning and spaces where students broadened their academic interests and learned how to become responsible and critically engaged citizens. To quote from her essay “American Studies as Traveling Culture” (1999):

[A]s a teacher and mentor, I have always conceived of my job as that of a kind of travel agent, not so much telling students what they should or should not study but teaching them as much as possible about the variety of the field, helping them to get to where they think they want to go themselves, and putting them in touch with the relevant specialists (354-55).

At that time, MIR also devoted herself to the creation of an Anglo-American Department (later the GEAA) which she believed should be both profoundly democratic and academically rigorous. Even when informal, her contact with junior lecturers in the early stages of their career was always an inspiration. She generously shared with them a constantly updated knowledge in a fast-changing academic field she would later define as “plural”, “never fixed”, “nonhomogeneous”, “a multiplex diversity of local and global knowledges in different languages and forms” (*idem*: 343). Hence her typically modest self-definition as a “wanderer” who achieves no more than “temporary recordings of *passages*” (*ibidem*) in her journeys through American Literature and American Studies. But she gave others the incentive to pursue their own with equal passion and helped them to regard academic life as “a series of travel encounters or practices of crossing and interaction constantly troubling the localisms of common assumptions about culture” (*idem*: 358).

An insistence on high academic standards is central and essential to her concept of what a University should be, and that is why in the 1980s she strongly reacted against external pressure and vehemently opposed the idea that Universities, and particularly the Faculties of Letters should turn themselves into mere teacher training institutions. History has proved her right...

Irene Ramalho Santos' career has always been based on a profoundly international outlook. She regularly attended ASA conferences, participated in round table discussions on American Studies in Portugal and abroad, was a founding member of the Portuguese Anglo-American Studies Association (APEAA), served with distinction as a board member of EAAS, and, since 1999, has regularly collaborated with the University of Wisconsin-Madison as a Visiting Professor. In 2008, the American Studies Association conferred on her the Mary C. Turpie Award in recognition of her valuable contribution as an international American Studies scholar.

The SEAA still benefits from the international network she created, in which the Fulbright programme played a crucial role. Maria Irene Ramalho Santos made brilliant use of it. She never surrendered to dictates of expedience or short-term advantage, or abdicated from the fundamental principle of excellence that brought us such distinguished visiting scholars and professors as Nancy Armstrong, Doris Friedenson, Angela Gilliam, Bernard Bell, Thomas Grant, Jonathan Auerbach, just to mention a few.

Her rigour, excellence and independence of mind amply justify the high reputation she enjoys in Portugal and abroad and the close ties she maintains with many prestigious international scholars: Sacvan Bercovitch, who invited her to contribute to his *Cambridge History of American Literature*; Harold Bloom, a former mentor, who received, through her intervention, an Honorary Doctor from the University of Coimbra in 2001; Nancy Armstrong, a life-long friend,

who extended her cooperation to the Centre for Social Studies (CES) and to the FCT Assessment Panels; Doris Friedenson, also a life-long friend, with whom she has so often co-published and collaborated in ASA Conferences. In this context mention must also be made of Allen Trachtenberg, Richard Ellman, Werner Sollors, James McIntosh, Emory Elliott, Susan Friedman, Paul Lauter, Mary Layoun, Amy Kaplan, Jean Pfaelzer, Michael Denning, Alice Kessler-Harris, George Monteiro, Helder Macedo, Robert Kroes, Heinz Ickstadt and Steve Matterson, among so many others

In 1991, her concern with the “crisis of the Humanities” and her constant spirit of inquiry and questioning mind led her to organize an international conference on “The Canon in Anglo-American Studies”. In her own words, “[t]he narrower the field, the easier to control, but though boundaries and laws, or *canons*, are necessities of scholarship as of life, their very definition requires various forms of questionings, crossings, and transgressions” (1994: 12). The constant interrogation of the order of things and the nature of knowledge is a thread running through MIR’s career, leading her to ask “America Where?”. This became the title of a conference on “Transatlantic Scholarship in Search of the United States of America in the Twenty-first Century” she organized in Coimbra in 2009, later published as *America Where? 21st Century Transatlantic Views* (Peter Lang, 2012).

MIR always encouraged others to expand their horizons and pursue diverse research interests. Having been a co-founder of CES in the late 1970s, she quickly invited colleagues from the GEAA to join her in a journey around Comparative Studies. Already a practising comparatist in her contributions to *World Literature Today*, MIR became the coordinator of a Comparative Studies Group in CES. She never forgot, however, her location within Portuguese culture; in her own words, “without a firm grasp of their own culture, no peoples will ever be able to understand *the other* in a foreign

culture; conversely, the more the different peoples know and *want to know* about other societies and cultures, the better prepared they are to understand their own” (1994: 12). Consciously refusing any “scholarly nativism” (cf. “American Studies as Traveling Culture” 341), she uses her knowledge of America to enrich her journeys inside her own culture. She is a member of the International, Brazilian and Portuguese Associations of Comparative Literature, and has over the years cooperated with several Comparative Literature Departments, mainly Wisconsin-Madison.

Very much aware of the secondary status of poetry in academic research on both sides of the Atlantic, this “travelling agent” strove to put it on the map. Her book *Atlantic Poets: Fernando Pessoa’s Turn in Anglo-American Modernism* (University Press of New England, 2003)¹ is both the high point of her interest in Pessoa (the subject of many of her publications) and a comparative reflection on those other poetic voices of American culture to which she has devoted a large part of her career.

It would be impossible to list in the space available the manifold dimensions of MIR’s work in the field of poetry. Her teaching, in which she encouraged students to read and critically discuss poetry; her many public presentations of famous poets and of other, less well-known and more experimental figures; her promotion and dissemination of contemporary Portuguese poets; her numerous papers and publications both at home and abroad; her coordination of interdisciplinary research projects; her supervision of MA and PhD theses – these are just some of the dimensions of her work in the field of poetry. Work is perhaps not the right word to describe MIR’s engagement with poetry; it is more of a calling – a calling also felt by every poet everywhere.

¹ Translated in Brazil (Belo Horizonte: Editora UFMG, 2008), and in Portugal (Porto: Afrontamento, 2009).

Her concern with poetry goes, however, beyond the poetic. For her the study of poetry is a form of intervention in the public sphere, a means of “interrupting” orthodoxies and dominant discourses and of opening up the world to other possibilities and perspectives. In 1990, over a lunch (anybody who knows MIR is aware of how much she enjoys good food and good company) she came up with the idea of a “meeting of poets” to bring live poetry into academia. In 1992, as a celebration of Walt Whitman, the 1st International Meeting of Poets took place in Coimbra (poetry happening all over the town!). This was followed by seven others, every three years, until 2010. Many Portuguese poets in that first meeting had never read their work before a live audience. The event changed the Portuguese cultural scene for ever; MIR’s initiative gave rise to a trend that continues to this day.

More than 300 poets and 40 languages were heard in Coimbra during the 20 years of the International Meetings of Poets, creating networks between poets, scholars and lovers of poetry. Some poets came to us, wishing to participate, from places as far away as Singapore or as central as New York, putting Coimbra on the map of contemporary world poetry. We have MIR to thank for this, and many have indeed thanked her from many locations and in many languages. The seven anthologies of the *Poesia do Mundo*, which gather many original poems and their respective translations, put together by a team under MIR’s coordination, are a testimonial to this fact.

Persistently claiming that poetry has a “radical uselessness,” she has taught us that “poetry teaches us that nothing is fixed, that everything should be questioned, that we should always look again” (“A ciência e as humanidades” 133). From her we have learned that poetry is an act of presence whose meaning is never exhausted and, as such, it’s an encouragement never to give up and never to forget to participate.

Another constant in MIR's career is her commitment to postgraduate studies. A demanding but supportive supervisor ("orientadora" in Portuguese) she always claimed that her supervision left candidates more "disorientated" than before. Even with the scant resources of the time, she was the creator, in 1982, of the first MA in Anglo-American studies at Coimbra, followed in 1999 by the first MA in American Studies and in 2008 of the first PhD program in American Studies in Portugal.

She is also responsible for bringing Feminist Studies to Coimbra, initiating the first MA in Feminist Studies in 2007 and then in 2008 creating the first PhD – a dream come true for MIR, whose involvement with the field was already apparent in her teaching and publications. In CES, she was instrumental in the creation of a Feminist Studies Research Project between 1998 and 2000. Already an internationally recognized specialist in the field, she Co-chaired the Task Force for International Women in American Studies (ASA); was Chair of the Program Committee for the Third European Feminist Research Conference in 1996 and 1997, and a member of the Scientific Committee for Women's Studies in the European Project SIGMA between 1994 and 1996.

MIR's career and personal stance can perhaps best be summed up as one of perpetual engagement with the world and of a deliberate "interruption" of dominant discourses in her attempt

to contribute to the ongoing redefinition and reassessment of the humanities as being, precisely, the faculty to ask questions. . . . questions also about the social, economic, and political structures that govern our intellectual lives. Questions, then, not only about the scholarly achievements of humanistic studies, but also about their educational responsibilities and their social commitments (1994: 28).

Spanning more than 40 years – and still going strong – her trajectory can almost be read as a history of the critical and theoretical developments of the last four decades. In the organization of this volume, we wanted to do justice to the manifold dimensions of MIR's research interests and pay tribute to her pioneering intervention in many crucial areas of study.

The different sections of the book allowed us to gather contributions from specialists, colleagues and students who over the years have reflected on the same issues, entered into a dialogue with her and benefitted from her learning and experience. And if pragmatic reasons demanded separate chapters, we believe that it is still apparent in many of the articles how MIR's perpetual crossing of boundaries and transdisciplinary thought has been passed on and has helped others to extend their intellectual horizons and transgress established lines.

The first five sections are devoted to academic papers; but we could not leave out the Testimonials of all those who have known MIR as a colleague or friend. In these matters, the person is as important as the scholar, and in MIR's particular case, the human and academic qualities are inseparable. The testimonials bear witness to the fact that the figure of the woman, the scholar, the mentor, the colleague and the friend all fuse into a harmonious – and irresistible – whole.

Last but not least – the poems, a tribute from all those Poets to whom MIR gave a voice or provided with a public forum where their voice could be heard. The present volume would have to give poetry pride of place, as it is given pride of place – both as critical object and artistic form – in MIR's thought.

Our thanks are due to the Dean of FLUC for the financial support of the print version of this volume, and to IUC to have made this project viable.

Finally, we would like to thank all those who contributed, in one form or another, to this volume. Their enthusiasm and commitment

were much valued and served as inspiration to help us complete the task of putting together this *Festschrift* in honour of someone who is, and always will be, for those who admire her (to quote from one of her favourite poets) “*the edge of one of many circles*”.

Thank you, Maria Irene!

Coimbra, 28 June, 2016

Isabel Caldeira
Graça Capinha
Jacinta Matos

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