

*At a meeting of the FACULTY OF ARTS AND SCIENCES on October 6, 2020, the following  
tribute to the life and service of the late Joaquim-Francisco Mártires Coelho  
was spread upon the permanent records of the Faculty.*

## JOAQUIM-FRANCISCO MÁRTYRES COELHO

BORN: February 26, 1938  
DIED: September 25, 2019

Joaquim-Francisco Coelho, Nancy Clark Smith Professor of the Language and Literature of Portugal and Professor of Comparative Literature, *Emeritus*, loved words—the words of poetry, the words of the many languages he spoke and read with ease, the words of scholarship, and the words of the heart. A luminescent student of Portuguese and Brazilian literatures, whose subtle and fine mind ranged expertly and enthusiastically across centuries of literary and artistic creativity, Joaquim was a quiet scholar, willing teacher, gentle mentor, raucous interlocutor, loving family man, and wise counsellor. He was a humanist in the grand tradition.

Born in Belém do Pará, Brazil, where as a university student he studied law, Joaquim moved to the United States to teach Portuguese. He earned his doctorate from the University of Wisconsin–Madison and held a fellowship from the prestigious Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation as a graduate student for study in Portugal. Joaquim taught at Washington University in St. Louis and at Stanford before coming to Harvard in 1983. Over the years, he authored books and articles on all centuries of poetic creativity in Portugal and Brazil. His first monograph was on the great twentieth-century Brazilian poet Carlos Drummond de Andrade, *Terra e família na poesia de Carlos Drummond de Andrade* (1973). A book on another influential Brazilian poet, Manuel Bandeira, soon followed (*Manuel Bandeira Pré-Modernista*, honored with a preface by anthropologist Gilberto Freyre, 1982), after which Joaquim focused his scholarly writings on Portugal and Europe.

With a characteristically astute critical eye and methodological agility, Joaquim studied, with verve and rigor, a wide range of novelists and poets that make up Portugal's rich literary landscape. The modernist poet Fernando Pessoa was a favorite topic, about whom Joaquim penned many essays, some of which eventually became the chapters of *Microleituras de Álvaro de Campos* (1987). An abiding interest in the poetics of nineteenth-century fiction found expression in essays on the novelists Julio Diniz and Eça de Queiroz, this latter figure the subject of a brief 2006 monograph, *A morte de Fradique Mendes*. The poet Antero de Quental was the topic of two books, *Microleituras de Antero* (1993) and *Antero de Quental*:

*A Poesia na Actualidade* (1999). As a comparative literature scholar, Joaquim's luminous readings of Portuguese authors stood side-by-side with piercing and erudite glosses on Virgil and Borges, Chateaubriand and Lorca, Garcilaso de la Vega and his beloved Rilke. The breadth of Joaquim's scholarly interests, covering topics such as medieval poetry, Luís de Camões, Diego de Velázquez, Pierre Corneille, and seventeenth-century Portuguese poetry, shines in the 2010 collection of essays *Letras de jornal*.

Joaquim's love of letters is perhaps nowhere more evident than in *Os meus Orfeus* (*My Orpheuses*), a collection of his own poetry published in 2001. Like the personal reflection on his beloved teacher Jorge de Sena (*O mestre do minotauro [Apologia de Jorge de Sena]*, 2008), *Os meus Orfeus* is a testament to Joaquim's intensely personal commitment to verse as a treasury of voices from different moments in life and in history. The collection stands alongside the many exquisitely designed broadsides of individual poems Joaquim published throughout his life, broadsides that evoke venerable publication traditions in Portugal as well as Brazilian concretist art. Joaquim made voices from the present and past audible in his poetry and in his critical essays, a talent magnified by his own rich baritone when he recited long stretches of poetry in his classrooms and in his personal conversations, a practice he encouraged his students to adopt. Joaquim was something of a poetic and interpretive Orpheus, lovingly conjuring the music of poetry through these recitations and restoring poets of the past to new life in seminars and readings.

From the first days of his arrival at Harvard, Joaquim-Francisco Coelho oversaw the growth of the Portuguese program, with burgeoning undergraduate interest in the field, and he kept the graduate program alive and thriving and frequently sought out collaborations with other departments such as the Department of Comparative Literature, which he chaired from 1985 to 1988. Under his aegis, a senior Brazilianist, the renowned cultural historian of Brazil Nicolau Sevcenko (d. 2014), joined the Department of Romance Languages and Literatures. A personal friend of many seminal figures in Portuguese literature and the humanities (Vasco Graça Moura, Almeida Faria, Eugénio de Andrade, José Guilherme Merquior, and Antonio Sánchez-Romeralo, to name a few), Joaquim brought luminaries to his classroom and to Harvard with an attitude of easy familiarity and sociability that was an inspiration to students and colleagues alike. Any visitor to Joaquim's office in Boylston Hall would immediately have been struck by the range of scholarly interests and erudition witnessed by the many heavily used books stuffed onto groaning shelves, books that sat alongside mementos of Brazil, in particular a company of small statues of Saint Sebastian crafted by Brazilian folk artisans that inhabited the corners of tables, the recesses of shelves, and the tops of filing cabinets.

To be a student and colleague of Joaquim-Francisco Coelho was to be part of a special world, capacious in its vision of humanistic endeavor and unflinching in its intellectual rigor and a world in which there was always, always a joke and a smile. Joaquim's intellectual and personal light now shines from above, his love of learning, his love of words, and his humanity refracted in the lives of his family, friends, and students who remain. In one of his odes, Ricardo Reis

(a heteronym of Fernando Pessoa) wrote, “Assim em cada lago a lua toda / Brilha, porque alta vive” (Thus in each lake the entire moon / Shines, because it lives on high).

The Harvard chapter of Phi Beta Kappa celebrated Professor Coelho’s career with an honorary membership in 2013.

Joaquim is survived by his loving wife, Jill Young Coelho; his daughters, Anita and Dorothea; his grandsons, Tyson and Otto; and his son-in-law, David Cohen.

Respectfully Submitted,

Bruno Martins Carvalho  
Mary Gaylord  
Luis M. Girón Negrón  
Josiah Blackmore, Chair