

RESENHA DE *STATES OF GRACE: UTOPIA IN BRAZILIAN CULTURE*, DE PATRÍCIA I. VIEIRA

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“Let Hawai’i be here,” [O Havaí, seja aqui”] sound out Caetano Veloso’s lines, dreaming of an ideal in “Menino do Rio”—one small instance of how ubiquitously utopian models of thought present themselves in Brazilian culture, echoing across a variety of media. Initially imagined as the island of Santa Cruz, Brazil is not just a canvas for mythology and speculation at the advent of the Age of Discovery—explored with dizzying erudition in Sérgio Buarque de Holanda’s *Vision of Paradise* [*Visão do Paraíso*]. Rather, as Patrícia Vieira lays out, it is a country with a particularly strong *utopian drive* (even for the Americas), in which utopian thought is adapted and perpetuated across the culture, applied and considered in various incarnations that parallel Thomas More’s imagining of the far-off island of Utopia. In literature alone, the study of such representations could lend itself to tomes. In her brief new book, *States of Grace: Utopia in Brazilian Culture* (SUNY, 2018), Vieira is expert in leaping through time, following a broad path of utopian thought as she shifts between the panoramic and its emblematic representations in close-up. Despite the scope of the project and a variety of difficult source texts over four centuries, the book remains impressively accessible for those outside the field. In tracing the currents of this considered history, Vieira focuses on the reconciliation of two main models: one of a “paradisiac past” and one of a “messianic tradition of a utopian future” adapted to an increasingly secular environment (xv). Functionally, she argues, utopian models potentially provide an “intra-historical transcendence” and represent the drive to “valorize possibilities” and “jolt society out of a stagnant status quo” (xiv).

Her analysis begins with Father António Vieira, highlighting the 17th-century Jesuit’s role as a bridging figure between the New World and Old. Father António was, on the one hand, a recognized intellectual of Europe, friend and preacher to John IV [João IV], and on the other, a defender of indigenous rights,

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a Tupí-Guaraní-speaking missionary in Brazil's hinterland. Vieira draws from a variety of his texts, while focusing primarily on *History of the Future* [*História do futuro*] as a bridging text that theorizes the realization of the Kingdom of Christ on Earth; it is a text that Father António viewed as performative, participatory in an ushering in of his conceptualized Fifth Empire (9). Initially drawing charges of heresy, the ultimate synthesis here is a reconciliation of the temporal and earthly with the spiritual, in which a secular emperor (John IV) and spiritual emperor (the Pope) will rule side by side. In this messianic kingdom, corporeality remains but does not rule human action (27); warfare conceptually disappears (25); and the distance between Christians, Jews, and indigenous peoples narrows in an idealized Catholic environment (6). Father António's fusion of the temporal and spiritual fuels, Vieira asserts, a large influence on utopian thought in Brazil (16). That being said, she focuses primarily on observing and identifying currents and patterns of thought rather than mapping out Father António's impact in specific representational terms.

Perhaps most familiar of the ideas set out in the book is that of Brazilian nature and the Amazon as feminine, which Vieira breaks down into two opposing categories—one of virginal and bucolic promise and another of wild, infernal threat (32-33). Following the model, these are set against exploitation, settlement, and superimposed Western societal organization as masculine. Vieira argues that a decline of the area's rubber boom in the first half of the 20th century creates the space for a resurgence of utopian thought in the familiar myths of the Hellenic warrior tribe, dreams of El Dorado, and an Edenic, uncorrupted landscape. She examines *The Mysterious Amazon* (1925) [*A Amazônia misteriosa*] by Gastão Crul, *Land of the Icamíabas* (1929) [*Terra de Icamíaba*] by Abguar Bastos, and a variety of subsequent texts by Oswald de Andrade. Through them she shows how the rise of communist politics and disillusionment connected to World War I find their expression in the trope of unconquered, matriarchal societies that live in proto-communist harmony with nature.

Vieira argues that this model of exploitation, feeding off a conception of local natural richness linked to nationalism, also finds its counterbalance in narrative that attempts to move away from anthropocentrism. While the effect, of what she terms *zoophytographia*, acquires a *utopian* label in the book, it is not so much a precise, competing utopian model, but, at a higher level, a cosmology - or even *state of grace* - that would disarm or potentiate utopian formulations. Present in Machado de Assis at the end of the 19th century, and more fully realized in the work of João Guimarães Rosa and Clarice Lispector, Vieira proposes the category of zoophytographia for literature that incorporates animal and plant perspectives into its narratives. Vieira traces the prevalence of this type of literature to an Amerindian perspectivism that works against notions human centrality and the objectifying of other living beings—epitomized in a shamanic tradition of interspecies fluidity. While she builds an important case for this influence, how and to what extent

this indigenous perspectivism might be responsible for creating, facilitating, or reinforcing the zoophytographic trend in Brazil seems difficult to delineate. For example, in Rosa's "Conversation of Bulls" ["Conversa de bois"], which Vieira examines, the perspectivism in the narrative potentially dialogues with a variety of aligned traditions, including assorted fables and *The 1001 Nights*. Vieira goes on to spend the most time in this chapter on Lispector, exploring the strong presence of flora and fauna throughout the writer's prose. Effectively presented as the greatest practitioner of Brazilian zoophytographia, Vieira extensively connects this element to Lispector's trademark metaphysical and ineffable currents. She is presented as an author who understands the elusiveness and impossibility of the non-human perspective. However, in pursuing it, argues Vieira, she manages "to alienate human beings themselves, to defamiliarize our habits and social norms" and, as with the cockroach in *The Passion According to G.H.* [*A paixão segundo G.H.*], appreciate the "shared life that traverses them both" (86, 94).

Utopian (and dystopian) conceptions of the future often address an environment in which society is no longer structured around labor. Vieira briefly surveys a thread of intellectual thought going back to the Industrial Revolution, which celebrates leisure and speculates on a diminished need for work as civilization progresses. She highlights Ulrich Beck's concept of *Brazilianization* [*Brasilianisierung*], as an inversion of Western development, in which Brazil potentially serves as a model for the "informality, flexibility, and, above all... ductile approach to formal work" awaiting everyone (118). This model, she points out, has its roots in Golden Age notions of the past and a prelapsarian, pre-arrival Brazil in which exertion was limited or unnecessary. Homing in on the Modernists' appropriation of the indigenous figure, she reads *Macunatma* as a revindication of idleness and references Oswald de Andrade's utopian vision of a future that will see the reconquest of leisure and usher in the higher pursuits that come with it. In this schematic, the *malandro* becomes a champion of leisure, and, citing Roberto Schwarz, a figure resistant to the modernizing, capitalistic project of the Brazilian dictatorship years (137). Vieira argues that if work, in Marcusean and Freudian terms, means a repression of the sexual instinct, the *malandro* becomes a figure of liberation for the future utopia. With Roberto da Matta as a point of departure, she sees the *malandro* as the embodiment of the Carnival spirit, and Carnival as utopian in its lack of work, playfulness, sexual liberation, and linking of members within the culture. While negative aspects of the *malandro* are skipped over, the theory here, drawing from a wide variety of primarily familiar concepts, creates a wonderfully creative and compelling composite.

The book rigorously incorporates a large range of study, from foundational theory within and outside the field to newer viewpoints, including ecocriticism. In this journey, it utilizes canonical and more obscure literature with equal ease, working toward an innovative and deeply rich amalgamation. In bringing it to an

end, Vieira saves her more contentious conclusions for a speculative close that sees utopian models as the consideration of the marginalized within a society and effectively “a sociopolitical alternative to the ruling global order” (155). In a final, tantalizing argument, she sees the pervasiveness of utopian thought across Brazilian culture, and its misapplication, as contributing to two familiar opposing poles in the country. In this model, intensely national *ufanista* sentiment and acute, berating self-criticism permeate throughout the culture, feeding off unrealistic expectations of what is, in essence, a fantastic far-off island.

