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Ficcao cientifica, fantasia e horror no Brasil 1875-1950
(review)

Jossianna Arroyo

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Nazareth Soares Fonseca; “A mulher e a casa: Modos de ser, modos de estar,” of Angélica Soares; “Ficção, fatura e falta: Machado de Assis e a questão da idade,” by Paul Dixon; “Idade como crítica em *O tempo e o vento* de Érico Veríssimo,” of Theodore Young; and “Ideologia e ident/idade na literatura brasileira,” by Maria José Somerlate Barbosa, the organizer of the collection.

As pointed out in the essays by Ivete Lara Camargos Walty and Professor Barbosa herself, modern Brazilian culture in particular chooses to look *forward* rather than *backward* and displays much more interest in youthful and futuristic subjects and concerns than in gerontological ones. Given that premise, the present volume may offer a salutary, balanced tonic for scholars and Portuguese-language readers in general. Its multifaceted character invites a broad readership among those eager, or at least willing, to escape the “madding crowd” for a few hours and meander along a “road less taken” in the interests of a broader perspective of age and literature.

Mary L. Daniel

University of Wisconsin–Madison

Causo, Roberto de Sousa. *Ficção científica, fantasia e horror no Brasil 1875–1950*. Belo Horizonte: Editora UFMG, 2003. 337 pp. Notas. Bibliografia.

In his book entitled *Ficção científica, fantasia e horror no Brasil 1875–1950*, Roberto De Sousa Causo defines, reviews and historicizes the influences of the science fiction genre—*ficção especulativa ou científica*—in Brazil from the nineteenth century to contemporary authors. For the author, who has been involved with science fiction publications as a reader, editor, and writer, particularly since the 1980s, the book started as an academic project in the Departamento de Teoria Literária e Literatura Comparada da Universidade de São Paulo.

The book has been divided into three chapters with an introduction and includes a collection of color images of book covers, journals and posters from authors such as H.G. Wells (*A guerra dos mundos*); Edgar R. Burroughs (*Tarzan and Amazing Stories*); and Brazilian authors such as Gastão Cruls (*A Amazônia misteriosa*) (1925) and Berilo Neves (*Século XXI*) (1937). All these images are focused on the author’s definition of science and speculative fiction as a genre: “o modelo de investigação especular de seus próprios objetos, originários da própria estrutura da qual o autor extrai os elementos da sua produção, mas com um sujeito exótico, uma alteridade que é virtual—o Outro é o ser alienígena” (62). To encounter “otherness” or the Other appears here problematized, since Brazilian authors write precisely from this *virtual space* of a *mundo subdesenvolvido* which is in itself an “Other.”

This colonial paradox, which as Antonio Candido has argued defines Brazilian literature and culture, culturally and politically finds a problematic axis here, since scientific and speculative fiction are popular genres that are in many ways crossed by influences of European (mainly British) and United States authors.

Causo solves and also maintains this recurrent paradox in his historical readings of Brazilian speculative and science fiction by working with summaries and reviews of books and authors that have influenced Brazilian production. These summaries of works, including travel narratives from Gilgamesh to colonial chronicles of conquest and time-space travel, include a diversity of works and authors from H. G. Wells, Edgar Allan Poe, Edgar Rice Burroughs, J. R. R. Tolkien; Marion Zimmer Bradley (*The Mists of Avalon*); and Isaac Asimov.

In the introduction and in Chapter 1, *Mito, realidade e ficção especulativa* and *Protóficção especulativa*, the author focuses on these many encounters with the “Other” as ways of defining *estranhamento* as a condition of modernity. Definitions of *fantasia* and *sense of wonder*, as part of mythical constructions in the works of travel literature, build an imaginary of the *real maravilhoso* in the Américas. The author also mentions medieval influences in Brazilian literature such as *literatura de cordel* that have created works of the *cordel fantástico* genre, such as Bráulio Tavares’s *A Pedra do Meio dia do Artur e Isadora* (1979). But it seems that the horror genre—influenced by the works of Edgar Allan Poe—was key to a production of works during the nineteenth century, such as Álvares de Azevedo’s *Noite na taverna* (1878). In Azevedo’s work, European characters and gothic themes appear as a way of displacing São Paulo’s “rusticidade e insipidez” (108). In Coelho Neto’s *Esfinge* (1908), hybridity, monstrosity and sexuality are intermingled themes in which feminine subjects and femininity are the final secrets to be revealed. Causo finishes his chapter with a summary of “vampire” texts from the 1990s, such as Gerson Lordi Ribeiro’s “Universo de Palmares”; Ivanir Calado’s *A mãe do sonho* (1990), *Imperatriz do fim do mundo* (1992) and “Tia Moira” (1994). The author does not problematize this critical view of social reality (the vampire as a translator of colonial relations) and displaces the uniqueness of these texts, along with the emergent film production they have created, as “imitações arrancadas dos clichês dos filmes norte-americanos e ingleses” (110). Here the author dismisses these texts as “imitations,” something that should be defined and underscored as a strategic move of textual (and cultural) representation.

In Chapter 2, entitled *Romance científico*, Causo starts by defining the “era of inventions” in nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century Brazil—Landell de Moura, Santos Dumont, and, in science, Oswaldo Cruz—in order to locate a double discourse about scientific technologies. On the one hand, one has Brazil as a place in which many scientific and technological inventions were accomplished, and, on the other, “the tragic drama” of dispossession and non-recognition that lay behind them. Brazil’s late nineteenth and early twentieth century saw the emergence of many social, religious and political theories, such as Social Darwinism, eugenics, Kardecian spiritualism, positivism, feminism, fascism and communism, among others. Although, as the author makes clear, the book industry has a late start in Brazil, there is a place for many of these early authors in the press.

At the same time, for these authors, Brazilian culture and politics are defined from a racialized/feminized body vis-à-vis Eurocentric/US theories of racial supremacy and colonization. Many of these authors, such as Emílio Zaluar

(*Doutor Benignus*, 1875) and Monteiro Lobato (*O presidente negro ou o choque das raças*, 1926) embraced pre-Columbian utopias (Zaluar) or imagined social ones, in which inferior races would disappear (Monteiro). Spiritualism as an alternative to scientific positivism appears in the work of Enneas Lintz (*Há dez mil séculos*, 1926), Berilo Neves's ("A costela de Adão," "O psicógrafo") and Machado de Assis's short stories ("O imortal"). One example is Neves's "O psicógrafo," in which a photographic camera takes pictures of the soul making clear the intentions of the characters. While inter-galactic travel is portrayed in Albino J. Ferreira Coutinho's *A liga dos planetas* (1926), a feminist embodiment of local politics is exposed in Aldazira Bittencourt's novel *Sua Excia. a Presidente da República do ano 2500*, and the longing for authoritarian leaders is portrayed in Rodolpho Teophilo's *O Reino de Kiato. No país da verdade* (1922). For critical theorists such as Susan Canty Quinlan, novels such as Bittencourt's exposes social ambiguities of what is defined as the "primeira onda do feminismo no Brasil" (159). In many ways, the feminine and femininity along with sexuality appear as central themes in many of these works. Nevertheless, social utopias are depicted along pre-Columbian indigenous themes, and seem to have been more popular among readers. In these utopias, the Amazon appears as a "mundo perdido" that is, nevertheless, close to social realities. Two examples are *A Amazônia misteriosa* by Gastão Cruls and *A República 3000* and *A Filha do Inca* (1927) by modernista writer Menotti del Picchia. While in del Picchia's *República* Brazil is populated by Cretan descendents that arrive before the Portuguese, creating a civilization's utopia, Cruls's novel takes us to the myth of Amazon warrior women as a critique of current social realities.

In the last chapter, entitled *O Pulp: A Era que não houve*, the author explores pulp magazines and stories from the United States (1920–1940) to define how pulp stories were not as influential in Brazil as they were in the United States. There is a divide here, as the author makes clear, in the hierarchies that define the "literature" and "popular writing" that influence this historical period. Nevertheless, as Causo mentions, authors such as Guimarães Rosa, and the emergence of *literatura fantástica* (such as that of Jorge L. Borges, another influential author from the period) could be seen as an alternative to these pulp magazines. This is an interesting point but one that is not fully developed in the text.

Following this there is a brief analysis of the scientific magazines, books and journals from the 1960s onwards, such as *Fantastic*, *Galáxia 2000*, and the emergence of Editora Globo and other publishing houses that sponsored them. Although there is a brief reference to censorship, the author does not explore in depth the influence of the military dictatorship on these publications. If the Brazilian cultural (and publishing) industry was shifting throughout these political eras it would be crucial to analyze in depth the cultural content and specificity of many of these works and authors. Causo finishes the chapter with a summary of the work of Jerônimo Monteyro during the 1930s. His series "Aventuras de Dick Peter, o herói moderno" became a successful radio broadcast, on Radio Tupi, in 1937. In 1938, Edições Publicações published his work in many series.

Here Causo leaves out, as he also does in Chapter 1, a key element that I believe is important to understanding why these “absences” happened in Brazil in this particular historical period. To contextualize more, it would be crucial to address how Getúlio Vargas’s populist era and politics “created,” transformed, and influenced mass media. In this sense, radio, cinema, and television—and their social shifts in the 30s and 50s and in the 60s and 80s—are crucial to understanding the trajectory of science-speculative fiction in Brazil. Particularly for a population that does not have access to literature and to the written word, mass media industries are venues for reading many of these exchanges. It is from this point of view that the author briefly explains the connections between film, cartoons and television for contemporary science fiction magazines such as *Sci-Fi News Contos*, and *Quark* 8. Although these magazines disappeared around 2002, the author sees future venues for their publication.

Causo’s book is a unique contribution to an understudied subject that has had a strong impact on the Brazilian literary and cultural industry. *Ficção científica* studies these fictions to reevaluate them as literary works. Although it recuperates them as literary texts, it brings forth other contradictions. The author’s desire to summarize these works and to establish their relationship with their North American and European influences minimizes important themes related to the uniqueness of Brazil’s production. All of these junctures, mainly historical, could be well described by *subdesenvolvimento*, copy, or mimetic phenomena due, as the author explains, to Brazilian colonial relations with advanced “technologies” or cultural industries. If the author wants to make us see these works in their social complexity, he must go beyond *subdesenvolvimento* theories and translate his passion for science fiction to other means. It would help to clarify that literature, as representation, is also a technology, parodied, subscribed and enriched by the agency of colonial underdeveloped subjectivities. This problematic in itself will address more effectively all these “encounters” with the Other in Brazilian modernity. Speculative and science-fiction genres should be studied as open texts that, together with other popular genres—including media industries—offer technologies for understanding the complexities of cultural processes, society, politics, and subjectivity.

Jossianna Arroyo

University of Michigan, Ann Arbor

Barbieri, Therezinha. *Ficção impura—Prosa brasileira dos anos 70, 80 e 90*. Rio de Janeiro: UERJ, 2003. 121 pp.

Acidamente criticada como banal e empobrecida ou elogiada com veemência como independente e criativa em relação aos padrões estéticos consagrados, a ficção brasileira contemporânea vem se colocando como um fértil campo de estudos críticos para quem nele se aventure. Entrando nesse campo, Therezinha Barbieri, no livro *Ficção impura—Prosa brasileira dos anos 70, 80 e 90*, tenta dar conta de algumas linhas de força que nele interagem.