

Passages de Paris, n° 22/23 (2021/2022)

REVIEW: LOBO, Luiza. *Fábricas de Mentiras: do Vale do Café ao Arco do Triunfo*. 1st edition. Rio de Janeiro: 7Letras, 2022. 528 p.¹

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Fábrica de mentiras: do Vale do Café ao Arco do Triunfo, by Luiza Lobo, is a novel about the coffee plantations of the Paraíba do Sul River Valley in Rio de Janeiro State and its economic life after the abolition of slavery and the proclamation of the Republic. It reveals the ignominy of slave work and the difficulties of the patriarchal society in 19th Century Brazil. It describes how this estate society sustains its power by prestige, namely by acquiring monarchical titles and by stimulating intermarriage between cousins and uncles to maintain or increase rural properties within the family. Marriage is not a matter of choice, especially for women, but a way to assure economic interests and to sustain the profits derived from coffee produced in those huge plantations.

The protagonist of the novel is the figure of Eufrásia Teixeira Leite, who inherited her parent's fortune with her sister Francisca. However, going against the tradition, Eufrásia chose to remain single and to leave Vassouras and the Coffee Valley for Paris, which explains the subtitle of the book. She followed the financial activities of the Teixeira Leite clan, but did not want to pass it away to a husband, according to the laws of the times.

Thus, Eufrásia rejects the patriarchal rules that would assign her to marry her cousin on her mother's family. The powerful Campo Belo owned one of the most powerful farms of the Valley, the Secretário coffee farm, and the intermarriage of Eufrásia with her cousin was taken for granted by her mother, who descended from them. She had even promised her daughter's hand. The other daughter, Francisca, was sick and could not

¹ First publication: REVISTA BRASILEIRA DE FILOLOGIA – n. XXVIII – September 1, 2022, p. 128-131.

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have children, which was an important factor in marriages at the time, so she never married and let her sister decide about their future.

After the death of their parents, it was Eufrásia who took the decision to move away from their influential families, and it represents a feminist challenge to that estate society of prestige and power. In Paris, Eufrásia decuples her parents' inherited fortune, especially after the death of her sister, in 1899, when she dedicates to buy international stockhold. She was, therefore, a pioneer in feminism, but also in the finances. She was the first woman ever to enter Paris Stockmarket, the most important of the world in the beginning of the 20th century. And she held a precious collection of modernist art in a five-storey mansion not far from the Arch of Triumph.

The novel also follows the story of other families of the Teixeira Leite clan who were cousins of Eufrásia and Francisca. On December 24, 1766, the author traces the birth of the German Johann Friedrich Landhof near Bremen. He married Anne-Sophie Frölich, and the young couple established itself in Lisbon. They constitute a family of musicians in Lisbon. One of their sons, Friedrich Rudolf Landhof, marries the Irish Katherine Laidley in Lisbon and this young couple moves to Rio de Janeiro in 1827, bringing along her piano on an old warship called Porkspine. The story accompanies the lives of Friedrich Rudolf and Katherine, who open a coffee export business in Rio de Janeiro. Their son Henrique Gaspar risks his chance in a coffee plantation after he married Eufrásia's cousin Lália, a grandchild of the baron of Vassouras. After they go bankrupt with abolition of slavery and personal or business mishappenings in the farm, their children, mostly women, strive to survive in the capital of the new Republic of Brazil, Rio de Janeiro. The book covers many aspects of the way of living of the barons and the rich farmers of that coffee region in the Parahyba River Valley.

The etymology of the name Euphrasia in Greek means "joy, delight" (see José Pedro Machado, *Onomastic and Etymologic Dictionary of the Portuguese Language*, Oporto: Confluência, no date). In spite of that, we feel a certain lack of guilt on the part of Eufrásia, however unconscious, toward the poor, when she refuses to donate to some beggars, stating, in French: *–"J'ai mes pauvres,"* (*–"I have my own beggars,"* See the Epigraph, *Fábrica*, p. 11). Thus she unknowingly repeated her traditional uncle, the baron of Vassouras, at the window of his mansion in the city of Vassouras that he

helped to found, but in Portuguese: –“Tenho os meus pobres” (“I have my own beggars”). (Lobo, p. 385).

Lobo’s novel (p. 472-473) reminds one of Nietzsche’s *The Anthropologic dream* number 8 when the latter refers to the proximity that exists between life and death, God and man. He even states that the idea of a superman derives from the imminence of man’s death. Eufrásia’s father – Joaquim José Teixeira Leite, a brother of the baron of Vassouras – and her mother, Ana Esméria Correia e Castro, grandchild of the baron of Campo Belo, die soon and leave their heritage to their two single daughters.

After they become millionaires, in a way the sisters replicate their ancestors’ patriarchal habits, since they refuse to get married, exactly as their father wished. Euphrasia refrains from marrying the famous intellectual Joaquim Nabuco (p. 304). He is a handsome, intelligent, erudite young man, but not of a lineage and not a proprietor of land or of a great fortune or even holding a good job. He wants to be a politician, with the ups and downs of this uncertain profession. In 1876, Eufrásia refuses to lend him money for his election, for she fears – and with reason – she will never see her money paid back. But Joaquim is deeply offended with this refusal, interpreting it as a moral assumption on the part of Eufrásia that he would not return the money, not because of the uncertainty of the political career. This troublesome relationship would continue throughout the 14 years of their relationship, with continuous breaks and crises. He travels from London or from Brazil to visit her in Paris. In the French mansion, the curtains were always drawn to hide from curious Brazilian visitors passing by. In hotel Whyte, in the Tijuca forest, in Rio de Janeiro, they would meet mostly foreigners. They were seldom seen in public places. Staying together would never be accepted by the public opinion, let alone staying under the same roof in a hotel without being married.

When Eufrásia was 21 years old, an age already considered too advanced for marrying, her mother once worried because she refused to marry the viscount of Taunay, who had an established career and came from a prestigious French family of lineage. The viscount insisted on the liaison after she was orphaned and became a millionaire, in 1873. He finally married Eufrásia’s cousin, Cristina, the daughter of the Baron of Vassouras, Francisco José Teixeira Leite.

Eufrásia's father, Joaquim José Teixeira Leite, tries to discourage her to choose Nabuco as her fiancé, when he notices they were in love, by saying: "Eufrásia, why did I buy you the most beautiful mansion in Rio, in the section of Laranjeiras? Why did I build you a fortune in stockhold? Why must you bury your future in these romantic dreams that will bring you only unhappiness? What to expect from a boy like Nabuco, who has nothing of his own, even if his father is a senator now?"

He could not predict that this Joaquim, nicknamed Quincas, would be one of the leaders of the slave abolition movement in Brazil as a very important politician, and a diplomat, and an author of several important books, as well as one of the founders of the Brazilian Academy of Letters. At this moment, Eufrásia's father saw in him only an adolescent who wanted to be a poet. At the time, fathers used to marry their daughters with older men. But he preferred that she did not marry at all and that she kept her power of decision to herself. And this is what she did.

Much later, when the romance between the millionaire and the man of letters and politician Joaquim Nabuco was well advanced, in France, Nabuco wrote a book review criticizing the novel *Senhora*, by the famous romantic writer José de Alencar. Not only did he state that it was immoral but also that the female character Aurélia could not be found anywhere (Lobo, p. 361). Clearly, he was mistaken and unaware of how much Eufrásia resembled Aurélia, and how much he, himself, acted like Fernando Seixas, a man who chased a convenient marriage with a rich female inheritor. This was the idea society had of himself (Lobo, p. 362). At least this book review was useful for "Quincas" (his nickname) to do a catharsis for his frustration of losing his fiancée for Paris (Lobo, idem).

Joaquim Nabuco conquered the sympathy of the Brazilian writer Nísia Floresta, in Paris. At first Eufrásia was jealous, for he was such a notorious gallant. However, soon she found out that Nísia was very old and ugly. She could never locate any of the various books that Nísia stated that she had published in Europe, in Portuguese or in translation.

The relationship between Quincas and Eufrásia begins to freeze since 1876, when she first denies to lend him money for his political campaign. Therefore, then at 26, Eufrásia already thought that her fortune was more important in her life than marriage. Although

she loved him, she thought that marrying him would oblige her to transfer to him all of her money and even have to follow him in his political career in Brazil. Her sister “Chiquinha” (Francisca’s nickname) was also strongly against their marriage, since she had given Eufrásia a power of attorney to invest their money. The two sisters often fight over Nabuco.

On the political field, Nabuco belonged to the Liberal Party and fought for the abolition, whereas Eufrásia’s family defended the Conservative Party. She was an easy target for the deputies to reach Nabuco, and the press accused her of being a powerful slave owner, even if she had only a few slaves in her mansion in Vassouras. Her mother’s family of the Campo Belo had about 300 slaves in the Secretário farm, but the Teixeira Leite clan in general was of bankers but they were well-known. At any rate, their bank and coffee business financed coffee produced by slaves and they financed new crops or slave purchases (p. 390).

Resenting from being constantly accused of being a “slave owner” by the press, Eufrásia decides to get rid of that *anathème* (in French, since she lives in Paris since 1873), and she frees her few slaves who worked at her mansion in Vassouras. The word anathema seems to imply a double censorship: for those who falsely accuse her of being a slave owner; and for Joaquim, who does not own a single slave, either because he has always lived at his parents’ house or abroad or because he had never had any property of his own (Lobo, p. 396). I see a hint at Nietzsche in the author’s style when Eufrásia mentions that she does not want anyone working for her “without a salary – and such despicable salaries they are” (idem).

Eufrásia misses her dear slave Antonio, who in her childhood took her on horseback to school or took her in his arms, so that she would not spoil her silk shoes. He also took care of her donkey Pimpão (Lobo, p. 397).

Tension raised. Hidden in the Tijuca forest hotel where she often takes refuge with Joaquim and Francisca, away from the citizens who condemned her deviant behavior, Eufrásia begins to fear: “And what if a revolution started against slavery? How could she, so vulnerable, escape? If the revolution occurred, she would lose her property in Vassouras, the stockhold that she had inherited from her parents, kept in Brazilian

banks, which she could not sell, but from which she drew the profits that assured hers and her sister's luxurious life in France, and her frequent travels to Brazil.

Looking at the beautiful bunch of red roses that Nabuco sends her every day to the hotel, which her "lady-in-waiting" lays in her beautiful cobalt blue vase of Sèvres (Lobo, p. 399), Eufrásia is suddenly taken by fear, and abruptly decides to leave for Europe. Nabuco is then dominated by the blue devils, because on top of her departure he loses his election for federal deputy by the State of Pernambuco. He stayed too long in her company at the forest hotel and thus relinquished his political campaign. It is interesting to notice that in Portuguese the word "blue" means happy, cheerful. On the opposite, in English it means sadness, as in the expression "blue devils" employed by the Author to denote Nabuco's derelict and melancholy state of mind.

Finally Quincas finds in Evelina, Eufrásia's cousin, a new rich and safe partner for his life. She was the second available heir in the 19th century scenery. Her inherited fortune came from her grandfather's sugar plantations in the North of Rio de Janeiro State (Lobo, p. 414). But Evelina was a deep catholic, and Quincas was an inveterate atheist. Junito Brandão reminds us (in *Helena: o eterno feminino*, Petrópolis, Vozes, 2013, p. 33) that the idea of making a good marriage and acquiring a fortune by choosing a rich bride was as usual in old Greece as it was in modern times, in the 19th or 20th centuries. In Greek, ἔδνα, a wedding gift, has its old Indo-European root in *wedh, which designates "to marry," but can only be applied to men, meaning "taking possession of a woman." Besides, γαμεῖν τινα refers only to men, and means literally "taking someone as his spouse." The same word applies to women, but it can only be employed in the medium passive voice and in the dative: γαμεῖσθαι τινι, meaning "to be taken as a spouse." Therefore, it becomes evident, from this grammatical standpoint, that man is action, whereas woman is passive, and that the dative mode reflects the total accomplishment of the verb.

In Latin, things are even more clear: "*ducere uxorem*" means to conduct the woman; and *domum* (home) means to get married and can only apply to men, that is, "to bring the woman to his home." However, there is not a specific verb for a woman who marries: "*nubere alicui*" means "to cover herself with a veil," or "to veil herself," which was a usage belonging to the nuptial rite. History has established this metaphor as

purity, and extended it to the idea of female virginity, as we see in its derivation as “*nubente*” (Brandão, p. 131). “*Nubente*” is the bride that covers herself with a white veil, white as the clouds – exactly what Eufrásia did not do.