

Review / Reseña

Brune, Krista. *Creative Transformations: Travels and Translations of Brazil in the Americas*. SUNY Press, 2020.

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Krista Brune's *Creative Transformations: Travels and Translations of Brazil in the Americas* is an outstanding contribution to contemporary Brazilian Studies at a moment in history when the perennial question: "what's Brazil's standing in the Americas?" is more timely than ever. Brune provides a safe answer to that question by highlighting the importance of translation as a key element to understand the role and significance of Brazil in the context of inter-American hemispheric relations. In tune with the so-called "translational turn" in the Humanities, Brune provides case studies and analyses that go well beyond the more restricted linguistic textual translation of Brazilian canonical texts from Portuguese to English. The author rightfully understands translation in a much broader sense, that is, a process—or a set of processes—of cultural translation that creates interconnections in a complex and multifaceted transformational dynamic. Brune stands on the shoulder of scholarly giants who have used the translational framework to advance North-South literary studies in the Americas (Earl Fitz, Jorge Schwartz, Charles Perrone, among many others). Brune, however, greatly contributes to the debate by also including the idea of movement in her analyses, thus making "mobility" central to her analytical framework. In her case studies, the notions of *translation* and *migration* come together boldly, a theoretical

maneuver that brings great epistemological benefits to her inquiry. What sets Brune's work apart from the long tradition of studies in "travel literature" is that she doesn't lean on travels *per se* as objects of analysis, but she uses the idea of movement and transference to understand translation—again, in a broader sense—and its impact on inter-American cultural and literary relations. In that sense, her work is also timely since it establishes a dialogue with another contemporary research trend, the so-called "mobility turn," made popular by Mimi Sheller and John Urry. The mobility paradigm allows Brune to analyze literary and cultural texts in a new light, thus contributing to work pioneered by Walter Moser, Stephen Greenblatt and others.

Creative Transformations: Travels and Translations of Brazil is made up of four chapters, each of which highlights a main case study advancing Brune's main argument that Brazil's role in the Americas can only be understood vis-à-vis the spectrum of linguistic-cultural translation included in the answers and displaced representations. Her carefully chosen objects of study include *O Novo Mundo*, a newspaper edited by legendary Brazilian journalist José Carlos Rodrigues in New York in the 1870s (Chapter 1); *Macunaíma*, Mario de Andrade's *magnum opus* and one of the most canonical works of Brazilian modernism, first published in 1928 (Chapter 2); the influential literary works and critical essays produced by Silviano Santiago in the second half of the twentieth century, such as *Stella Manhattan* and "O entre-lugar do discurso latino-americano" (Chapter 3); and finally, the fictional works written by Adriana Lisboa, one of the leading figures of contemporary Brazilian literature, including her award-winning books *Azul-corvo* (2010) and *Hanoi* (2013). These case studies give Brune's analysis not only historical depth, but they also show the breadth of her theoretical framework and its applicability to a variety of objects that include periodicals, literary narratives and critical essays.

Chapter 1, entitled "The New World Travels and Translations of *O Novo Mundo*", presents an informative analysis of a relatively unknown Brazilian newspaper published in New York between 1870 and 1879. Brune's interest in *O Novo Mundo* lies in the fact that the newspaper was not conceived primarily for Brazilian immigrant readers in the United States, but rather "traveled" to be read by audiences in Brazil, showing them the United States of the time. As a result, *O Novo Mundo* necessarily had to engage in acts of cultural translation between the then young nations of North and South America. Brune emphasizes how *O Novo Mundo* promoted a completely new point of view for inter-American hemispheric relations without solely focusing on European metropolises. Unquestionably, the principles of progress and civility were

anchored in Eurocentric views of the world, but the periodical had a pioneering role in making two giant and incipient American nation-states the main actors of their reports, articles, and essays. Their common hemispheric interests in political, social, economic, cultural, educational and technological modernization were then at the center of their searches for national identities, and this inter-American search was exploited by *O Novo Mundo*. Brune's fascinating investigation discusses the travels of North American scientists to Brazil, the visits of Brazilian Emperor Pedro II to the United States, as well as the essays written especially for the newspaper by renowned authors such as Sousândrade and Machado de Assis. In this chapter, Brune's analysis becomes ever more intriguing when she scrutinizes how *O Novo Mundo* covered the 1876 Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia and Brazil's participation in this world fair. How does Brazil portray itself capitalizing on the well-established images of a tropical country but at the same time attempting to attach the idea of modernity to its brand? How to reconcile the "exotic" and the "modern" for US audiences while constructing the image of a vibrant new American country? How does a Brazilian newspaper published in the United States interpret and "translate" such processes to an overseas audience? These are some of the questions Brune insightfully addresses while applying her translational-mobility approach to understand Brazil's position in the Americas in the late nineteenth century.

Chapter 2, "Modernism for Export: The Translational Origins and Afterlives of *Macunaíma*," explores the complexities of one of the most daring, complex, and multilayered works of Brazilian literature. Few books in Brazil have been as studied, dissected, interpreted and reinterpreted as Mario de Andrade's masterpiece. Therefore, it is a challenge to propose a new approach to this model of Latin American modernist literature. Brune succeeds in doing so thanks to her "travels and translations" framework that captures the elaborate intricacies of *Macunaíma* on different levels. In her extensive knowledge of translation, Brune explores the many stages and processes of creative transformation involved in *Macunaíma* before, during, and after the publication of the book in 1928. Brune rightly establishes that *Macunaíma* is the result of travels of peoples, stories, and ideas that begin in Amazonian Amerindian culture and continue their journey through the Americas through cinematographic and literary recreations of Andrade's work. First, at its origins, there is the rich set of indigenous legends and myths compiled by the German anthropologist Theodor Koch-Grünberg (1872-1924) during his ethnographic travels in the Amazon. Andrade appropriates Koch-Grünberg's narratives found in *Vom Roroima zum Orinoco* 1911-1913 (*From*

Roraima to Orinoco) and blends them with the knowledge gained in his own trips to the Amazon and beyond to create *Macunaíma*. Second, there is the translational challenge to amalgamate these Amerindian Amazonian tales that existed only in spoken language with other aspects of Brazilian culture, and turn them into a literary work written in Portuguese. The result, as Brune points out, is a complex integration of popular sayings, indigenous terms and foreign words that proves to be equally fascinating and enigmatic to Brazilian audiences. Brune cites a 1944 interview in which Andrade states: “quis escrever um livro em todos os linguajares do Brasil. O resultado foi que...me fiz incompreensível até para os brasileiros” (“I wanted to write a book in all the dialects of Brazil. The result was that...I made myself incomprehensible even for Brazilians”) (75). Following its critical acclaim in Brazil, Brune discusses the challenges of turning Andrade’s text from Portuguese to English so that North American audiences could have access to his most successful novel. By analyzing specific attempts to publish *Macunaíma* in English, Brune shows the potentials and limitations of translating seemingly “untranslatable” literary fictional works. Brune analyzes different translations of *Macunaíma*—from the failed attempt by Margaret Hollingsworth to translate the book to English in the 1930s—to the highly-criticized English version published by E. A. Goodland in 1984. In *Macunaíma*’s complex genealogy of transcreations, Brune highlights that ironically the works of art that had more success in expanding Andrade’s audience to North America and beyond were not the traditional interlingual translations, but its filmic adaptation by director Joaquim Pedro de Andrade in 1969 and the intertextual novel *The Ventriloquist’s Tale* by Guyanese writer Pauline Melville in 1997. When the movie version of *Macunaíma* was launched in the United States, its North American distributor, New Line Cinema, grossly mischaracterized it with a laughable English title, *Jungle Freaks*, and sold the movie as “95 minutes of Brazil nuts.” In addition to such mischaracterization, the movie’s reception was impacted by another complicated aspect of cultural translation, namely the creation of subtitles that could express the ideas and nuances presented in the movie. While traditional literary translations present their own difficult challenges, movie subtitles need to take into account not only linguistic factors but also rhythmic, spatial, visual and temporal reading specificities. Brune highlights that in face of seemingly insurmountable challenges, film scholar Randal Johnson and movie critic J. R. Molotnik were key cultural mediators who made the movie more understandable to English speakers, even if it was to a more limited circle of North American, specialized audiences (95-97). Rounding up Chapter 2, Brune presents another enthralling case study—Pauline

Melville's *The Ventriloquist's Tale* (1997). In this intertextual novel, the Guyanese author reimagines Macunaíma as the narrator of another Amazonian story, this time taking place mainly in English Guyana. By bringing a Guyanese novel to her comparative inter-American analysis, Brune navigates uncharted territory. While the cultural and literary relations among Brazil, Spanish America, the Caribbean, the United States and Canada encompass a robust number of academic works, English Guyana has traditionally been a "blind spot" even in the most comprehensive scholarly work on inter-American identity. Brune closes this gap and contributes greatly to existing inter-American scholarship by analyzing *The Ventriloquist's Tale* as a postcolonial novel from a trans-Amazonian perspective that includes Brazil, Venezuela and Guyana.

After a vast and deep analysis of *Macunaíma's* translational re-creations, Chapter 3 analyzes the displacements and travels found in Silviano Santiago's works, with special emphasis on his prominent essay "O Entre-Lugar do Discurso Latino-Americano" (1978), the novel *Stella Manhattan* (1985), and the short story "Borrão" (2005). Brune portrays Santiago as an important "translator," in a broader sense, of languages, ideas and peoples in the Americas. Brune notices that "though he rarely translates texts from one national language to another, he embarks on linguistic and cultural translations in fiction set in the United States by inserting Spanish, English and French phrases into his prose and alluding to political, cultural and geographic specificities." (119). In "O Entre-Lugar do Discurso Latino-Americano" ("The Space In-Between," 1978), Santiago echoes his modernist predecessors in arguing that Latin American writers consume, digest and recreate cultural elements from Europe and North America to produce unique literary and cultural works of art. Arguably, his work of fiction does this not so much through the eager cultural cannibalism of the early modernists, but rather under the sign of displacement and the exchanges and negotiations of transnational migrants. Santiago's characters are usually immigrants in the United States who have to constantly negotiate identity, language and space. In that sense, Brune reads Santiago as a translational "mediator" or "negotiator" rather than a postcolonial or postmodern cultural agent, as he is often regarded in current scholarship. Brune shows how Santiago's work is informed by his own biography of mobility and displacements in which the United States, Canada, Brazil and Europe become fluid geographical points that serve to deconstruct the ideas of copy and original, center and periphery. Code switching and Babelian linguistic encounters are part of everyday life in Santiago's fictional universe. As a consequence, translating his works from Portuguese to English presents a new set of challenges that are characteristic of a more

globalized world, and Brune gives her readers plenty of insights on such translational processes. For instance, *Stella Manhattan* incorporates foreign words and code switching to represent the experience of Brazilian immigrants living in the United States. For Brazilian readers, that also serves to portray the linguistic and cultural displacement of the novel's characters. How to keep the same sense of deterritorialization for English-speaking audiences in translated versions of the novel? What solutions have translators chosen and what has resulted from representing the immigrant experience when the displaced viewpoint is fundamentally altered?

Finally, Chapter 4 discusses the contemporary works of Adriana Lisboa, including *Azul-corvo* (2010) and *Hanoi* (2013). Adriana Lisboa, with her already influential books, can be regarded as the heiress of Santiago's tradition in her portrayal of Brazilian immigrants, undocumented Salvadorians, Vietnamese refugees and other "aliens" in the United States. However, while in Santiago's works the inter-American experience comes from exile, in Lisboa's fictional universe characters are on the move due to economic reasons or as a result of an ever-increasing globalized world. As a counterexample to *Macunaíma*, Brune analyzes how Lisboa's direct style and apparently simple prose seem to pose minimal challenges for translation, therefore making her work attractive and market-friendly for international audiences. However, Brune vigorously argues that a closer look at Lisboa's narratives reveals aspects that, despite initial appearances, are not fully translatable. Brune states that "gestures of resistance in her prose point to the potential for a politics of untranslability, even as the narrative relative accessibility situates the novel in the market realm of translability" (150). By way of a thorough and detailed analysis of some of Lisboa's major literary works, Brune navigates between the notions of "translability" and "untranslability," and in the process reveals how translation must be understood far beyond the superficial textual level.

Krista Brune's first monograph, *Creative Transformations: Travels and Translations of Brazil in the Americas*, is a very welcome addition to contemporary Brazilian Studies in the United States, and will be of great interest to any scholar specializing in hemispheric inter-American literary and cultural relations. Additionally, Brune's work suggests exciting new avenues of research in which translation studies and mobility studies can be combined in innovative analytical frameworks to shed new light on a variety of cultural objects, from acclaimed canonical literary works to newspapers, films, and essays.