From *Macunaíma* to Davi Kopenawa: Alternative Approaches to Translation and the Worlds of Literature

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Abstract: This essay draws on Brazilian and Amerindian ideas to reconsider world literature. It opens by outlining current trends to underscore how prominent critics from the Global North engage with ideas from Brazil. The next section examines how Brazilian anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro and Yanomami shaman and environmental advocate Davi Kopenawa articulate other ways of conceiving of the world. Their work invites further pondering of how an Amerindian perspective could complicate understandings of the world and, by extension, world literature and translation. Finally, I illustrate the relevance of these approaches by reading Mário de Andrade's *Macunaíma* as a literary text whose strong ties to Amerindian cultures challenge translators and demand a reconceptualization of the worlds of world literature.

Keywords: Brazilian modernismo, Amerindian perspectivism, untranslatability, world literature

As a method, a theory, and a classification, world literature offers possibilities of dialoguing beyond linguistic and national borders and, in the process, establishing unexpected points of comparison and divergence. These discourses of world literature initially surged in academic realms of the North or, more specifically, in Anglo-American, German, and French contexts. However, since

at least the middle of the 1960s, Antonio Candido and other critics have emphasized the impossibility of studying Brazilian literature without recognizing the connections to and influences of other literary traditions. In contrast with the universalizing vision of *Weltliteratur* that Goethe and Marx proposed in the nineteenth century, contemporary critics, including Emily Apter, Pheng Cheah, and Theo D'haen, recognize in their conceptualizations of world literature contributions that come from supposedly peripheral literary traditions. Yet the question remains of what the "world" of world literature means. Is it a singular world that subsumes and supersedes all national literatures, along the lines that Marx articulated, or does it contain multiple and heterogenous worlds, either real, imagined, or speculative?[1] In recent debates, the "world" tends to serve as a capacious placeholder to situate literature within a center/periphery model linked to world-systems theory (Moretti and Warwick) or to discuss circuits of exchange and influence (Casanova and Damrosch).[2]

A more nuanced approach to understanding cultural and linguistic hierarchies between and within literatures invites us to turn our attention to Indigenous, Creole, and otherwise marginalized languages that remain excluded from many discussions of world literature. At the same time, cosmovisions and narratives from these traditions serve as the mythic-poetic base for literary works that circulate in realms of world literature. Writers, critics, and editors have often deemed cultural practices from marginalized peoples as "raw material" for the creation of supposedly more refined aesthetic products. Underscoring the contributions of Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and otherwise overlooked sources to literary works with global circulation offers an alternative to what Emily Apter condemns in *Against World Literature* as the homogeneous forms and simplified aesthetics that often dominate world literary circuits. In this piece, I propose conceiving of a world literature that breaks free from its Eurocentric origins and

[1] In the "Manifesto of the Communist Party," Marx and Engels claimed, "The intellectual creations of individual nations become common property. National one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness become more and more impossible and from the numerous national and local literatures, there arises a world literature" (476-77). D'haen recognizes "a whole series of partially overlapping and ever-shifting maps," thus urging that "each and every one of such 'projections,' then, should go to make up the maps of world literature at any given moment in time, expanding into a historical atlas of world literature is we want to gain a fuller view of the field" (421).

[2] Friedman identifies these two main frameworks in recent criticism of world literature (501). Hayot focuses on "worldedness" and construction of "literary worlds" to move beyond these ways of conceptualizing world literature.

instead interacts with Indigenous languages, cultures, and epistemologies.[3] My approach emphasizes the role of non-Western languages and cultures in world literature, understood as both "writing that gains in translation" (Damrosch 281) and a "world-making activity" (Cheah 2). In doing so, I recognize, and strive to follow, Bruce Robbins's claim that "world literature is in essence an ethical project because, like the larger project of cosmopolitanism to which it belongs, it asks us to imagine or act out an ethical relation to the world as a whole" (391).

To arrive at this proposal, I will first outline current critical trends of world literature to underscore how prominent thinkers from the Global North engage with ideas from Brazil. I will then consider other approaches to conceptualizing the world by analyzing recent writings by Brazilian anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro and Yanomami shaman and environmental advocate Davi Kopenawa. Their work compels us to ponder how an Amerindian perspective complicates existing understandings of the world and the related concept world literature. Finally, I will discuss how Mário de Andrade's 1928 masterpiece *Macunaíma*, as a form of world literature rooted in Indigenous traditions and cultures, poses difficulties in translation. Committed to Amazonian and Amerindian stories, voices, and experiences, the texts of Andrade, Viveiros de Castro, and Kopenawa indicate the potential limitations of translation, especially the insistence on discourses of the translatable. Indigenous languages, cultures, and cosmologies resist modes of translation that prioritize intercultural communication and often establish false equivalencies between words and concepts. Moreover, the works that I study here question conceptualizing translatability as synonymous with legibility or market accessibility. They suggest the fruitful possibilities of misunderstandings and lapses in communication within and between languages and cultures that generate meaning and affect through unexpected encounters.

[3] See Stockhammer for an analysis of the Eurocentric connotations of the "world" in Goethe's view of *Weltliteratur*. Drawing on Heidegger's distinction between world and earth, Stockhammer posits "Earth literature," with its links to Spivak's "planetary literature," as a more appropriate and expansive concept than world literature. See Siskind for another conceptualization, explaining that "the 'world,' then, is the imaginary ground where Latin American cosmopolitan writers work through the traumatic aspects of the question of modernity, inscribing their modernist subjectivity in their universality" (10).

Brazilian Entanglements with World Literature Now

In recent debates surrounding world literature, writers and critics from the Global North continue to dominate, even as they reference works by scholars from the Global South. Most notably, Franco Moretti cites Roberto Schwarz's essay "The Importing of the Novel to Brazil and Its Contradictions in the Work of Alencar" in his conjecture on world literature in relationship to the world-system theory of economic history. Moretti uses Schwarz's statement that, in Brazilian letters, "foreign debt" is "not simply an easily dispensable part of the work in which it appears, but a complex feature of it" (Schwarz 50) to support his hypothesis that the world literary system is simultaneously one and unequal, whereby cultures from the center influence and alter those on the periphery (Moretti 55-6). Through a process of "distant reading" that relies on secondary criticism of primary texts, Moretti observes that, in line with Frederic Jameson's claims, the move toward the modern novel is "*always* as a compromise between foreign form and local materials" (60). The essay also cites Antonio Candido's "Literature and Underdevelopment" but relegates it to a footnote as an analogue to Jameson's binary view of foreign form and local content. Moretti nuances this vision to propose a triangle of "foreign *plot*; local *characters*; and then, local *narrative voice*" (65). Invoking Schwarz's ideas again, he claims that the "one-and-unequal literary system" is "embedded well into its form" (66). To a certain extent, Moretti's citation of prominent Brazilian literary critics suggests an inversion of influence, one where ideas from the periphery inform views from the center. Yet Moretti only references Brazilian intellectuals with essays translated into English without directly citing the literary examples that the critics discuss. As a result, the Portuguese words of Brazilian literary and critical texts exist as raw materials for the Anglophone scholar to interpret into an encompassing theory.

Moretti's approach to center/periphery dynamics in literary creation and circulation anticipates the work of the Warwick Research Collective (WReC). Their proposal is "to define 'world literature' as *the literature of the world-system*—of the modern capitalist world-system" (Warwick 8). In linking literary production to political and economic systems, they conceive of "world-literature as the literary registration of modernity under the sign of combined and uneven development" (17). As the WReC argument exemplifies, there is an increasing awareness of the need to consider terms such as "world" or "cosmopolitan" from a range of texts and contexts. Although current studies of world literature

recognize the potential of contributions from the Global South and other peripheries in the world-literary system, the key centers of theorization, like the WReC or the Institute for World Literature organized by David Damrosch, remain based at universities in the Global North. I acknowledge that my own thinking could fall into a similar trap given my background and academic position. However, in these pages, I aim to engage deeply with literary and critical perspectives from Brazil as I dialogue across nations and languages to reevaluate what the "world" means in world literature.

Critiques of world literature focusing on the implications of the term "world" without interrogating the meaning of "literature" thus assume what counts as literature by privileging written texts. Damrosch's definition of world literature, for instance, minimizes the importance of oral literatures by foregrounding editorial processes of circulation, translation, and production. The question persists of how attention to oralities of Amerindians, Afro-descendants, or other marginalized groups can challenge world literature's perceived "worldliness" and "literariness." Cheah provides one way to think about who and what constitutes the world of world literature by framing the world as "originally a temporal category. Before the world can appear as an object, it must first *be*. A world only is and we are only world beings if there is already time" (2). With this move away from the spatial cartographies of recent theories, he proposes a world literature that addresses contradictions of the modern capitalist world-system and elucidates connections to cosmopolitanism through a deeper study of their shared concept, the world. By contending that postcolonial literature is exemplary of world literature, Cheah envisions world literature as a less exclusionary realm consisting of languages and people often considered peripheral (2-5; 11-13). Yet inhabiting this literary realm depends upon global politics of translation and publishing, which continue to influence the circulation of texts and, consequentially, the visions of world literature. Placing these concerns at the center of my analysis encourages a sustained conversation about the idea of world literature, its relevance to the Lusophone context, and the possibility of conceptual and discursive alternatives.

A recurrent topic in debates about world literature centers on translation and the related concept of the untranslatable. In her Francocentric view of a "world republic of letters," Pascale Casanova emphasizes the importance of translations that unfold between national languages and literatures marked by differences of cultural capital. To illustrate her point, Casanova refers to Candido's analysis of

Latin America's limited literary capital due to high rates of illiteracy, limited networks of communication, and the continued non-professional status of the writer (Casanova 16). She does not mention the title of the specific essay, "Literature and Underdevelopment," where Candido discusses this idea of "cultural weakness" (Candido 121-22). Moretti also cites this Candido piece, which betrays how a limited number of writers whose works have been translated into English or French account for the majority of Brazilian perspectives in discussions of world literature in Europe and North America. Candido's essay, which was initially published in French in 1970, translated into Spanish in 1972, reprinted in Portuguese in 1987, and translated into English in 1995, marks a particular moment in Latin American intellectual history as it also exemplifies the transnational and multilingual trajectories of Brazilian criticism that travels. Casanova nonetheless positions Candido as almost entirely unknown outside of Brazil by referencing his English-language translator Howard Becker's introduction to *On Literature and Society*. Becker highlights how the critic's Brazilian identity coexists with his intellectual cosmopolitanism: "Thus rooted in his country's literary history and life, he is nevertheless fully involved in the literary conversation of the contemporary world. He writes about world literature [… and] topics of world interest, such universal topics as vengeance or catastrophe, as well as the common topics of contemporary critical writing: class, social change, political engagement" (xx-xxi). This praise frames Candido as a prominent scholar of world literature and critical theory, yet Casanova and Moretti most likely reference his work due to its translation into English as well as its content.

Likewise, Damrosch contends that world literature does not consist of a determined canon, but rather forms of writing that accumulate meaning via translation and circulation. Without acts of linguistic, literary, and cultural translation, world literature ceases to exist as a global realm of production and circulation. The politics and economics of language configure the dynamics of literary translation and the resulting commercial disparities of the global market. In discussing these inequalities, critics generally focus on national or regional languages with comparatively robust publishing scenes and print literary traditions.[4] Within this limited scope, Lawrence Venuti rightly notes that, "for

[4] Venuti analyzes the role of translation in the regional language of Catalan, as well as national languages of Italian, French, Spanish, and English, but does not study Indigenous or Creole languages and literatures.

developing countries, the trade imbalance in translation publishing carries negative consequences, cultural as well as economic" (*The Scandals* 162). While Venuti concurs about the centrality of translation to the concept of world literature, he also recognizes that "translation is fundamentally a localizing practice" (*Translation* 193). Furthermore, he contends that, "because translation always answers to contingencies in the receiving situation, the intercultural hierarchies in which it is implicated turn out to be more complex than the simple binary opposition between major and minor literatures" (194). Venuti thus invites a deeper contemplation of the nuances between and within national and regional literatures that navigate multilingual traditions and heterogeneous cultures through the lenses of translation and world literature.

Toward Other Worlds? Anthropological and Amerindian Ideas on Worlds and Translation

The ideas of anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro and Yanomami philosopher Davi Kopenawa complicate existing understandings of what the world means and, in doing so, offer a conceptual framework relevant to discussions of world literature. Similar to works of world literature, Viveiros de Castro's groundbreaking anthropological text *Cannibal Metaphysics* has generated new meanings and interpretations through its translation and circulation. The initial 2009 publication of *Métaphysiques cannibals. Lignes d'anthropologie post-structurale* was already a translation as Oiara Bonilla rendered Viveiros de Castro's original Portuguese prose into French. Subsequently, Stella Mastrangelo translated it into Spanish in 2010 and Peter Skafish edited and translated the English version in 2014. The work was only published in Viveiros de Castro's native Brazil in 2018 as *Metafísicas canibais: Elementos para uma antropologia pós-estrutural*, with Isabela Sanches and Célia Euvaldo editing and translating back into Portuguese, and the author reviewing the text entirely. In an opening note to the Brazilian edition, Viveiros de Castro explains that, "hesitei bastante; tergiversei, e procrastinei, e outros verbos da família, antes de aceitar publicar *Metafísicas canibais* no Brasil" (loc. 56). He intended to write a more comprehensive study that expanded upon articles previously published in Portuguese and English, which constituted the core of the original book. After concluding that he would never write this envisioned project, Viveiros de Castro moved forward with the Brazilian publication of

Metafísicas canibais in hopes of finding new readers. By noting that "tomei medidas estritas, em suma, para não escrever um outro livro. Mentiria se dissesse que tiver sucesso absoluto em obedecer a mim mesmo" (loc. 96), the anthropologist recognizes that translation and editing are forms of rewriting that involve creativity and transformation.

As an anthropological text, *Cannibal Metaphysics* must not be conflated with world literature. Viveiros de Castro's invitation to see the world in other ways and to imagine other worlds introduces alternative viewpoints and cosmovisions that could invigorate theories of world literature. He elaborates the concept of multinaturalist Amerindian perspectivism to describe the cosmologies and the epistemologies of Amazonian Indigenous communities. Drawing on Amerindian thought as well as the legacy of French structuralist anthropology and the theories of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Viveiros de Castro explains that various Indigenous cosmologies share a conception of the world composed of multiple perspectives. Amerindian perspectivism challenges the terms of Western epistemological debates by visualizing a unity of minds and a diversity of bodies that contest divisions between humans and non-humans and instead recognize human beings as different within themselves. As Viveiros de Castro explains, "perspectivism affirms an intensive difference that places human/nonhuman difference *within each existent*" (*Cannibal* 69). Due to this perspectivist difference, "humanity is reciprocally reflexive (jaguars are humans to other jaguars, peccaries see each other as humans, etc.), even while it can never be mutual (as soon as the jaguar is human, the peccary ceases to be one and vice versa)" (70). With this example of reciprocal reflexivity, Viveiros de Castro illustrates the specificity of Amerindian cosmovision. He clarifies this Indigenous mode of conceiving and experiencing the world by affirming "perspectivism is a multinaturalism, since a perspective is not a representation … because representations are properties of mind, whereas a *point of view is in the body*" (72).[5] Differentiating perspective in this manner establishes the Amerindian mode of interacting with surroundings as more affective and embodied than approaches based in sight, image, and representational language. Following this line of thought, Viveiros de Castro situates the body "between the formal subjectivity of souls and the substantial materiality of organisms … [as a]

[5] It is worth noting that the Portuguese version of this quote uses "espírito," which translates more literally as spirit, rather than "mente" (mind). These variations indicate the subtleties of meaning in translation.

bundle of affects and capacities, and that is at the origin of perspectivism. Far from the spiritual essentialism of relativism, perspectivism is a corporeal mannerism" (73). Multinaturalist Amerindian perspectivism, with its epistemologies of the body, allows for ways of perceiving, being, and knowing that extend beyond the representational realms often privileged in concepts of multiculturalism, cultural relativism, and world literature.[6]

The cosmology of multinaturalist Amerindian perspectivism is at play in the Amazonian myths and legends that serve as the sources inspiring Andrade's creation of *Macunaíma*, as I discuss more in the next section. The rhapsody pushes translation to its limits by engaging with Pemon tales and Amerindian thoughts on relationships and transformations between humans and non-humans. In his attempt to explain the multinaturalist character of perspectivism, Viveiros de Castro notes that "we are beginning to be able to understand how *Amerindian perspectivism* raises the problem of translation and thus how to address the problem of translating perspectivism into the onto-semiotic terms of Occidental anthropology" (73). Translation is not only a linguistic concern, but, more pertinently, a problem of epistemological and ontological transposition and interpretation. Questions persist, on the one hand, about how to translate between the cosmovision of perspectivism and ideas of the world established in the Western context and, on the other, about how processes of translation function within multinaturalist perspectivism. To respond to these challenges, Viveiros de Castro proposes a practice of perspectivist translation that accounts for multiple referents sharing one meaning. Perspectivist translation aims "not to find in human conceptual language a *synonym* … for the representations that other species employ to indicate the same thing 'out there'; rather, the objective is to not lose sight of the difference concealed by the deceiving *homonyms* that connect/separate our language from those of other species" (74). This approach to translation does not fall into the tired dichotomies of fidelity and infidelity, literalness and innovation, word-for-word and sense-for sense, or translatable and untranslatable that dominate most discussions of literary and linguistic translation. By recognizing the limits of semantic equivalence and valuing differences between even similar languages, epistemological systems, and

[6] Erich Auerbach's classic study *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* analyzes this representational impulse as a key feature of Western literature from Homer through Virginia Woolf. In *Against World Literature*, Emily Apter situates Auerbach, alongside Goethe, Lukács, and Said, in *Weltliteratur*'s "Euro-Romantic, neo-Hegelian, Marxist and humanist pedigree" (5).

cosmovisions, perspectivist translation represents a possible way of relating to and negotiating the untranslatable.

Viveiros de Castro further interrogates the relationships between Amerindian perspectivism, anthropology, and translation with an analysis of how the concept of cultural translation, as proposed by Talal Asad in the field of anthropology, dialogues with literary and linguistic visions of translation, most notably those of Walter Benjamin. In his comparative reading of these theories, the Brazilian anthropologist constructs a bond between translation, betrayal, and transformation given that the process of expressing the intent of the original expression in the target language involves a transformation. Within the disciplinary field of anthropology, as Viveiros de Castro reminds us, the name of this process is myth, which he envisions as synonymous with structural anthropology. He goes on to explain that "to translate Amerindian perspectivism is first of all to translate its image of translation, which is of a 'controlled equivocation'" (87). According to Viveiros de Castro, equivocations belong to a transcendental category constitutive of the disciplinary act of cultural translation. Situating equivocation as the productive basis for a comparative relationship brings to mind the creative and critical potential of the supposedly untranslatable posited by poet, translator, and critic Haroldo de Campos, whose work I return to in the next section.[7] Viveiros de Castro synthesizes his ideas about translation by affirming that "to translate is to presume that an equivocation always exists; it is to communicate through differences, in lieu of keeping the Other under gags by presuming an original univocality and an ultimate redundancy—an essential similarity—between what the Other and we are saying" (89). Equivocations, including misunderstandings, lack of communication, or excesses of interpretation, form the core of the perspectivist project of translation. However, equivocation does not mean error given the existence of multiple perspectives resulting in a plethora of interpretations and expressions.

In defining perspectivist translation, Viveiros de Castro determines that it is "one of the principal tasks of shamans" (74). As a Yanomami shaman and environmental activist, Davi Kopenawa embarked on the challenging task of perspectivist translation via his collaborative conversations with anthropologist Bruce Albert that culminated in the 2010 publication of *La chute du ciel: paroles d'un chaman yanomami*. This philosophical and environmental treatise follows

[7] See Cisneros's article in this dossier for more on Haroldo de Campos in relation to translation and world literature.

a transnational trajectory of production, circulation, and translation akin to Viveiros de Castro's study and, more generally, works of world literature. Its path to publication entails a series of linguistic and perspectivist practices of translation as Albert and his team recorded Kopenawa's words, transcribed them, translated the Yanomami language into French, and then culled and organized the materials. The resulting French edition has subsequently been translated into English as *The Falling Sky* in 2013, into Portuguese as *A queda do céu* in 2015, and into Italian as *La caduta del cielo* in 2018. Kopenawa's knowledge traveled from his origins in an Indigenous territory straddling Brazil and Venezuela initially to Paris, the capital of Casanova's world republic of letters, before circulating in print in Brazil and other parts of the Americas.[8]

Through a carefully constructed project of translation at linguistic, literary, cultural, epistemological, and ontological levels, Davi Kopenawa communicates Amerindian cosmologies and ideas to a broader public without flattening their particularities. He grounds his environmental advocacy in multinaturalist perspectivism:

> The forest is alive. It can only die if the white people persist in destroying it … Their shaman fathers will no longer be able to call [the *xapiri* spirits] and make them dance to protect us. They will be powerless to repel the epidemic fumes which devour us. They will no longer be able to hold back the evil beings who will turn the forest to chaos. We will die one after the other, the white people as well as us. All the shamans will finally perish. Then, if none of them survive to hold it up, the sky will fall. (Kopenawa xvii)

By conceiving of the forest as a singular living entity, Kopenawa contests colonial and neoliberal efforts to "control" nature through extractivist policies and practices. Without denying the impact of human actions on the natural world, he differentiates between spirits and shamans, who serve to protect his people and their forest home, and the invasive and destructive white people. In his role

[8] The Yanomami live in the Orinoco Basin in northern Brazil and southern Venezuela, slightly to the west of where Theodor Koch-Grünberg encountered the Pemon. These people speak one of the four major languages, each with various dialects, that belong to the Yanomami linguistic family, which is unrelated to Pemon and other Amazonian languages. See *The Falling Sky*'s appendices for more on the Yanomami languages and peoples.

as a shaman, Kopenawa must engage in acts of perspectivist translation. *The Falling Sky* is a key example of this practice as his first-person narration describes the Yanomami way of seeing and being in nature with accessible and vivid prose. Its ecological, ethnographic, and narrative perspectives invite readers to imagine other worlds and cosmologies, which necessitate a reconceptualization of world literature.

Perspectivist translation could help introduce seemingly untranslatable texts to a broader public and, in doing so, advance a politics of untranslatability that challenges the homogeneity of world literature. By defining perspectivist translation in dialogue with multinaturalist Amerindian perspectivism and structural anthropology, Viveiros de Castro offers another vision of how this mode of translation could unfold. He argues that "to translate is to take up residence in the space of equivocation. Not for the purpose of cancelling it (that would suppose that it never really existed) but in order to valorize and activate it, to open and expand the space imagined not to exist between the (conceptual) languages in contact – a space in fact hidden by equivocation" (Viveiros de Castro, *Cannibal* 89). This approach celebrates equivocation as evidence of the plurality of interpretations and meanings, rather than dismiss it as an undesirable error. To further his theorization of translation, Viveiros de Castro analyzes Lévi-Strauss's ideas about the links between translation and myth to posit, "If myth is translation, this is because *it is above all not representation;* for a translation is not a representation but a *transformation*" (205). Conceiving of translation as transformation, rather than as representation with its focus on equivalencies and synonyms, recognizes the possibilities of fruitful misunderstandings and creative equivocations. From their anthropological and Indigenous perspectives, respectively, Viveiros de Castro and Kopenawa offer alternative approaches to translation and to the concept of the world. Their ideas invite a more generative and capacious engagement with Amerindian literatures and cultures as part of a world literature that challenges Eurocentric paradigms.

The Other Worlds and Translations of *Macunaíma*

Turning our attention to *Macunaíma* makes the complex linguistic, literary, and cultural hierarchies of Amerindian, Brazilian and global contexts, and the related challenges of translation, even more evident. Published more than ninety years

ago, Andrade's masterpiece is an exemplary Latin American work since, per Djelal Kadir, the region's literature:

> has its genesis in a series of defining worldly matrices – the indigenous cosmogonies, the other-worldly New World of Christian eschatology, the propagandistic discourse in praise of worldly materiality of free real estate, minerals, and other earthly goods coveted by the conquerors…. Framed by these multiple senses of 'world,' Latin American literature could not have been anything other than world literature. (441)

Andrade navigated between multiple worlds, both in the sense that Kadir outlines and in the temporal categorization that Cheah proposes, as he playfully transformed Amerindian stories compiled by German ethnologist Theodor Koch-Grünberg into his fictional world. To collect myths and legends of the Arekuná and the Taurepang peoples, Koch-Grünberg relied on translations by two "native informants" Akulí and Mayulupaípu of the Pemon languages into Portuguese, which he then translated into German.[9] Expanding upon Sérgio Medeiros's study of the German traveler's relation to Amerindian cosmogonies, Thomas Beebee notes that:

> although it has been repeatedly remarked that Koch-Grünberg approached his subjects largely free of the blinders of theory, nevertheless, as in any other type of research or observation, a deep, unmentioned structure of theoretical presuppositions determined what was to count as data and what success would look like. Specifically, Koch-Grünberg's writings are imbued with recapitulation theory and with the racial and hereditary typology theories prevalent in his day. (102)

[9] As Lúcia Sá explains, Carib languages, including Pemon, are still spoken in the Orinoco Basin region between Brazil, Venezuela, and Guyana. Taurepang, Arekuná, and Kamarakato all call themselves Pemon, which means "people" or those who speak the Pemon languages. Koch-Grünberg referred to the Taurepang as Taulipang, and subsequent scholarship has often followed Koch-Grünberg's spelling rather than Amerindian conventions (Sá 3-5).

Andrade thus received an already mediated version of the tale of Makunaíma that bore traces of Eurocentric ideas and myths.[10] Without directly consulting the Amerindian sources, he studied works by Brazilian folklorists and historians and researched popular music and culture to supplement Koch-Grünberg's text.[11]

By integrating these different worldviews and temporalities, Andrade created a literary work that illustrates how world literature, per Cheah's formulation, highlights the contradictions of the modern capitalist world-system and engages in world-making activities. The proliferation of specific and diverse cultural references and the multilingual nature of the text have posed challenges to its circulation within Brazil and subsequently in translation. At the moment of the book's publication, the general critical reception was favorable, praising its originality and contribution to a reevaluation of Brazilian identity.[12] Reviews in the *Correio Paulistano* and the *Jornal do Brasil* reached more tepid conclusions by underscoring the book's incomprehensible elements, including what João Ribeiro described as "a concupiscência de termos tupis verdadeiros e fictícios de pura invenção, extra-regionalismos discordantes, e absurdos inefáveis" (IEB-USP-CAP-MP). This blend of linguistic investigation and imagination exemplifies how Andrade approached the writing of *Macunaíma* as a world-making activity. For José Vieira in the *Vanguarda*, this effort to create a Brazilian language and to combine elements from the entire country resulted in "qualidades que ainda são defeitos para o leitor comum" (IEB-USP-MA-MP). Andrade did not strive to satisfy the "common reader" by representing Brazilian reality; instead, he transformed its languages, cultures, and peoples into an invented world deeply imbricated with Indigenous myths and stories.

To facilitate the reception of the resulting novel, Tristão de Ataíde's review in *O Jornal* featured quotes from Andrade's unpublished prefaces "não só para entender a intenção do autor, como para livrá-lo de qualquer insinuação de

[10] For Gilda de Mello e Souza, *Macunaíma* functions as a satire of European chivalric romances, with the protagonist emerging as a carnivalization of the hero figure of those tales. Haroldo de Campos reads the rhapsody through a formalist and morphological approach that Vladimir Propp developed to analyze folklore.

[11] See Proença, Lopez's *Macunaíma: a margem e o texto* and her supplementary essays in the novel's 1988 critical edition, and Sá, especially chapter two, for more on the various sources that Andrade consulted to draft his text.

[12] For more on *Macunaíma*'s reception, see Ramos Jr.'s dissertation, especially its annex with facsimile copies of articles. The anonymous first review in the *Diário Nacional* was favorable. Writers, critics, and friends, including Tristão de Ataíde, Antonio de Alcantâra Machado, and Ronald de Carvalho, published other positive reviews.

plágio" (FBN: Periódicos). Raimundo de Moraes's *Dicionário de cousas da Amazónia* also defended Andrade against vague accusations of plagiarizing Koch-Grünberg's work by insisting that "o romanista patrício, com quem privei em Manaus, possui talento e imaginação que dispensam inspirações estranhas" (Andrade 427). In response, Andrade proclaimed in a September 1931 letter in the *Diário Nacional*, "Copiei, sim, meu querido defensor. O que me espanta e acho sublime de bondade, é os maldizentes se esquecerem de tudo quanto sabem, restringindo a minha cópia a Koch-Grünberg, quando copiei todos" (427). The writer embraced copying with a difference as an essential part of his creative practice as he rejected ethnographic fidelity to Amazonian stories, myths, and legends in favor of crafting a fictional world that de-regionalized Brazilian national identity and cultural expressions.[13] As a Brazilian modernist masterpiece and an increasingly renowned work of world literature, *Macunaíma* calls attention to the linguistic, cultural, and economic hierarchies that structure world literature as a product of the modern capitalist world-system.

In debating *Macunaíma*'s translatability, Mário de Andrade and his contemporaries exhibited anxiety over the text's ability to enter into these circuits. In an August 28, 1930 letter to Andrade, poet Manuel Bandeira claimed:

> Não é verdade que *Macunaíma* seja intraduzível. É intraduzível em toda a sua expressão tão gostosa, mas isso não é de longe o cerne da obra. Findo de parte o valor de criação poética que ele representa, ele valerá para o estrangeiro como um formidável repositório de populário brasileiro apresentado, não daquela maneira para mim intragável da ciência folclórica, mas como matéria viva. (Arquivo IEB-USP, MA-C-CPL1114)

Bandeira recognized that no single factor determines translatability, even as the prevalence of Indigenous terms, oral expressions, cultural allusions, and neologisms in *Macunaíma* prove challenging to Brazilian readers and foreign translators. In a subsequent letter to Margaret Hollingsworth, who wanted to translate the work into English, Andrade similarly affirmed:

[13] In an unpublished 1926 preface, Andrade explained that "um dos meus interesses foi desrespeitar lendariamente a geografia e a fauna e flora geográficas. Assim desregionalizava o mais possível a criação ao mesmo tempo que conseguia o mérito de conceber literariamente o Brasil como entidade homogênea" (Andrade 356).

> *Macunaíma* é de tal forma excepcional, como estilo e concepção, é uma obra tão fora dos limites comuns ou gerais da literatura, que naturalmente fica em mim uma curiosidade inquieta, tanto mais que tanto brasileiros como estrangeiros que o conhecem, o afirmam intraduzível. Não creio que seja intraduzível, dadas as condições que já combinamos da tradução desse livro. (Arquivo IEB-USP, MA-C-CAL 254)

Andrade also provided suggestions of how to render his work into English and offered to read her drafts.

While such a productive collaboration remained elusive and Hollingsworth's translation was never published due to lack of editorial interest, Andrade nevertheless developed through their correspondence a personal theory of translation that decoupled assessments of *Macunaíma*'s translatability from its readability or accessibility.[14] This approach anticipates the ideas of Haroldo de Campos in his 1962 essay "Da tradução como criação e como crítica." For Campos, *Macunaíma*, *Grande Sertão: Veredas*, and other experimental texts "tanto como a poesia (e mais do que muita poesia) postulariam a impossibilidade da tradução" (4). Instead of accepting the perceived impossibility of translation, Campos argues that "tradução de textos criativos será sempre *recriação*, ou criação paralela, autônoma porém recíproca. Quanto mais inçado (ou seja, permeado) de dificuldades esse texto, mais recriável, mais sedutor enquanto possibilidade aberta de recriação" (5). Following this line of thought, *Macunaíma* is translatable via re-creation since difficult texts open up possibilities for creative transposition or, in Campos's neologism, transcreation.[15]

As translations into Spanish, Italian, French, English, and other languages since the 1970s exemplify, *Macunaíma* does not conform to commonplace understandings of untranslatable as impossible to translate. Instead, Andrade's text and its trajectory in translation illustrate the potential of how Emily Apter and Barbara Cassin approach untranslatability as a philosophical question and a

[14] See the section "*Macunaíma* in Translation: Limitations and Possibilities of Literary Transcreation" in my book *Creative Transformations* for more on this correspondence and the novel's trajectory in translation (82-90).

[15] See Campos's 1985 essay "Da transcriação: Poética e semiótica da operação tradutora" for more on how "transcreation" relates to "creative transposition," Jakobson's term for how to render poetry into other languages.

mode for respectfully engaging with cultural specificity. In her introduction to the *Dictionary of Untranslatables*, Cassin explains:

> To speak of *untranslatables* in no way implies that the terms in question, or the syntactical or grammatical turns, are not and cannot be translated: the untranslatable is rather what one keeps on (not) translating. But this indicates that their translation, into one language or another creates a problem, to the extent of sometimes generating a neologism or imposing a new meaning on an old word. It is a sign of the way in which, in one language to another, neither the words nor the conceptual networks can simply be superimposed. (xvii)

What is necessary to emphasize in this definition is that the untranslatable raises not only a linguistic dilemma, but also a cultural, philosophical, and epistemological one. With its inclusion of Tupi words and Amerindian cosmovisions, *Macunaíma* confronts translators with the problem of how to express linguistic and conceptual worlds rooted in localized cultural practices in another language without overlaying and obscuring particularity.

Building on Cassin's notion, Apter conceives of the untranslatable "not as the name of a concept, but as a dual practice of theoretical interference and workaround … The Untranslatable imposes an exigent relation on the translator; it makes impossible demands, bringing the translation to the brink of failure, or brooking that failure in translations that never materialize" (105). When confronted with the impossible demands that *Macunaíma*'s untranslatables pose, translators have posited possible solutions, with varying degrees of success. In a failed attempt to appease publishers, Hollingsworth opted for domesticating solutions, which often disregarded Andrade's suggestions, in her incomplete and unpublished translation. Andrade's explanations of localized terms for Hollingsworth emerged decades later as a key source for Gilda de Mello e Souza's notes that accompanied Biblioteca Ayacucho's publication of Héctor Olea's 1977 translation of *Macunaíma* into Spanish as part of the modernist's *Obras escogidas*. According to Isabel Gómez, Andrade's glossary for Hollingsworth's unfinished translation hovers over Souza's notes as "an idealized ghost" that reveals the critic's presumption that the author would be the perfect translator (330). Gómez astutely analyzes the incompatibility of the

publication's two translation manuals: Olea's transcreation, which cited Campos's term as it aimed to creatively transpose the Brazilian text into a Spanish American context, and the editor's "thick translation," which sought to explain the text through extensive notes and critical essays by Souza and Campos. Despite is incongruous approaches, the Ayacucho publication reveals the potential of South-South translations to the creation and circulation of a world literature that foregrounds temporalities and cartographies of worlds beyond the Eurocentric paradigm.[16]

While Olea's Spanish transcreation deftly navigates the workarounds and theoretical interferences that Apter associates with the Untranslatable, *Macunaíma* has so far not enjoyed the same fortune in English-language translation. E.A. Goodland's 1984 translation falters in the face of *Macunaíma*'s untranslatables given his unfamiliarity with localized linguistic practices and cultural references, which results in a text plagued by literal translations and tonal errors.[17] Now out-of-print, this translation has hindered the circulation of Andrade's masterpiece among an English-language readership, perhaps indicating how the proliferation of culturally specific references and, in particular, Amerindian words and worldviews in *Macunaíma* push translation to its limits. The text's difficulties, including its multilingual nature and density of localized references, invite approaches to translation that move beyond literal meanings and attempted equivalence in order to embrace creative rewritings and transcreations. Currently, Katrina Dodson, whose translation of Clarice Lispector's stories received the 2016 PEN Translation Prize, is embarking on this task as she finalizes her English-language translation of *Macunaíma* for New Directions with an anticipated publication date of 2022. Thanks to fellowships from the Brazilian National Library and the National Endowment for the Arts, Dodson has consulted Andrade's manuscripts and notes, researched Amazonian flora and fauna, and carefully studied its mixture of regional and spoken Brazilian Portuguese, Tupi, other Amerindian languages, West African languages, and invented terms. Guided by research and intimate reading, she combines this more academic approach with a creative impulse to transform and reimagine references and sonorities in a way that resonates more with readers in the United

[16] See Lima for more on Biblioteca Ayachuco's role in crafting a "transnational literary system" that includes Brazil.
[17] See Braz for a detailed study of Goodland's translation and its limitations.

States. Dodson opens up the possibility for a perspectivist translation that acknowledges the creative potential of equivocation.[18] Her translation will emphasize *Macunaíma*'s Amerindian origins and related cosmovisions, thus calling attention to a critical element that previous translations either minimized or transposed to other contexts. Such a focus on the text's Indigenous roots invites a revision of the worlds of world literature.

Concluding Thoughts

Even with its mixed fortunes in translation, *Macunaíma* exists as a text of world literature that circulates between nations and languages without ceding to a homogeneous aesthetic that flattens linguistic and cultural specificity. As a work informed by Amerindian and Afro-diasporic myths and stories, *Macunaíma* also fits Cheah's definition of world literature with the world as a temporal category and its literature a world-making activity. Casanova even cites *Macunaíma* as an exemplary work within her world republic of letters. Conceiving of Andrade as the "anti-Camões" in a chapter about the "tragedy of translated men," she emphasizes the importance of the Brazilian *modernista* to the literary creation of a popular national language. Rather than quote directly from the source, she relies on the French translation, which was not published until 1979 due to, she contends, a lack of interest in translating the text. Her analysis of *Macunaíma* recalls her use of Candido's theory and Moretti's references to Schwarz and Candido as both critics turn to translation to interact with writings from Brazil. These critics' dependance on English and French translations exemplifies linguistic and cultural hierarchies that constitute world literature as a combined and uneven literary realm of the modern capitalist world-system. Moreover, for Casanova, focusing on popular language in her analysis of *Macunaíma* allows her to avoid direct discussion of the place of Amerindian languages, stories, and worlds in Brazilian literatures and, by extension, her world republic of letters.

Rethinking *Macunaíma* as a text imbued with Indigenous views of the world facilitates a deeper critical dialogue with Amerindian epistemologies and forms of life.[19] This shift in perspective invites a more sustained dialogue with recent

[18] I base my analysis here on my reading of an earlier draft of chapters one and five of Dodson's translation. I thank her for sharing the chapters and their explanatory endnotes with me.

[19] Sá astutely argues for the creativity already present in the Pemon narratives of Makunaíma, rather than assigning the story's originality to the interventions of Andrade as an educated writer. Through close readings of the tales that Koch-Grünberg collected in relation to *Macunaíma*, Sá identifies

anthropological and ecocritical works, including Viveiros de Castro's *Cannibal Metaphysics* and Kopenawa's *The Falling Sky*. These texts introduce conceptual frameworks that challenge Eurocentric concepts of the world, the Anthropocene, and representation. Embracing Viveiros de Castro's idea of perspectivist translation, which views equivocation as a fruitful practice that allows for the multiplicity of perspectives, would expand understandings of the worlds of world literature. This approach to translation relates to multinaturalist Amerindian perspectivism, which allows for the existence of imaginaries and cosmovisions beyond representational realms. Shifting focus to perception and the related practice of perspectivist translation invites a reevaluation of aesthetic preferences and translation practices within world literature, which, in turn, broadens this concept beyond models of circulation and center/periphery that currently dominate critical debates. Defining translation as transformation at linguistic, cultural, and epistemological levels reconfigures approaches to reading, interpreting, and translating the untranslatables that demand continuous returns.

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