

Book Review

Brune, Krista. *Creative Transformations: Travels and Translations of Brazil in the Americas*. State U of New York P, 2020.

In this informative and engaging new study, Krista Brune frames “translation as a critical tool for questioning the supposedly peripheral positions of Brazil and the rest of Latin America in the hemisphere and beyond” (19). Building on the work of such theoreticians as Haroldo de Campos, Héctor Hoyos, and Sergio Waisman, Brune argues that “Brazil’s hemispheric and global prominence depends upon and shifts through travels and translations” (21). An Assistant Professor of Portuguese and Spanish at the Pennsylvania State University, Brune is one of a cohort of young scholars who are undertaking comparative studies of hemispheric relations from the perspective of Brazil. This project is of immense importance not only to Brazil but to the related fields of comparative Latin American and inter-American studies.

Creative Transformations consists of an introduction, four chapters, and a conclusion. Chapter 1, “The New World Travels and Translations of *O Novo Mundo*,” focuses on the journal *O Novo Mundo*, which was published in New York City between 1870 and 1879 and which fostered improved understanding between the nations of the Americas, especially Brazil and the United States. Chapter 2, “Modernism for Export: The Translational Origins and Afterlives of *Macunaima*,” discusses the importance of Mário de Andrade’s extraordinary 1928 novel, or anti-novel, in an expanded and multi-form American context. Chapter 3, “Silviano Santiago’s Translational Criticism and Fiction,” concerns itself with the hemispherically engaged work of one of contemporary Brazil’s most important authors and critics. Chapter 4, “Testing Translatability: Adriana Lisboa’s Hemispheric Brazilian Novels,” concentrates on yet another brilliant Brazilian writer who cultivates not merely Brazil but its place in greater America, a place and a concept that far exceed the province of a single nation.

As the field of comparative inter-American literary study has continued to grow and develop, Brazil (along with Canada) is the nation that tends to get

elided. This is a shame, since Brazil possesses one of the oldest, richest, and most diverse national literatures in the Americas. This omission is also a sign of how, even among Latin Americanists, Brazil still suffers from a kind of “invisibility,” from being known about but egregiously understudied. Brune’s study takes a big step toward solving this problem.

One of this book’s greatest strengths lies in its cogent elucidation of why Brazilian literature, culture, and history are of such vital importance to the rest of the Americas, and, indeed, to the study of Global Literature. An important part of this line of thought stems from what Brune rightly perceives as the “diversity of Brazilian voices and styles” (185). In one of her most original contributions, the author calls for translators of contemporary Brazilian literature to feel freer to cultivate a “creative rewriting” of their texts, one that, putting Emily Apter’s notion of “untranslatability” into productive action, would allow for the transformation of supposedly “untranslatable” words and texts into closely equivalent words and texts. Rather than continue to remain trapped by thinking of “translatability and untranslatability as opposites,” Brune proposes that we imagine them as mutually enriching acts of creativity (185).

In another striking contribution, Brune urges that more of contemporary Brazil’s experimental writers be translated into Spanish as well as English so that they “reach a broader readership in the Americas” (189). To do this, Brune notes, would require that instead “of accepting market translatability as the predominant aesthetic,” we would have to consider how “a politics of untranslatability” could benefit “the circulation of Brazilian literature in Anglophone and global literary markets” (185). Such a transformation in our thinking about translation would almost certainly involve smaller publishing companies, as has been the case with Hilda Hilst and Raduan Nassar. If one considers adding French to this prescription, and perhaps some of our indigenous languages as well, Brune’s argument becomes even stronger.

While it should not be considered a weakness, one cavil concerning *Creative Transformations* could be that it does not make as clear as it might the many differences that distinguish Brazilian literature and culture from those of its Spanish American neighbors. That Brazil is routinely lost in the still nebulous idea that readers from the United States have of what they imagine as “Latin America,” a term too often understood in the U.S. as referring to Spanish

America alone, constitutes an obstacle to Brazil's greater appreciation here in the U.S.

At the same time, it must be said that Brune does call attention to one point that does set Brazilian literature apart. Building on work done by Karl Erik Schøllhammer and Beatriz Resende, Brune points out that contemporary Brazilian authors tend to “integrate themselves into their work with metafictional reflections and autofiction” and with a strong commitment to “*presentificação*” (153). This is an old tradition in Brazilian literature and, as Brune makes clear, it is alive and well today.

Creative Transformation: Travels and Translations of Brazil in the Americas is a superb new study. It makes a major contribution to our better understanding of Brazil and its exemplarity of the American experience. As such, it should be read by Americanists of all stripes.

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