

REPRESENTATION, (MIS) TRANSLATION AND REWRITING IN MARIO DE ANDRADE'S *MACUNAIMA* AND PAULINE MELVILLE'S *THE VENTRILOQUIST'S TALE*⁷²

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ABSTRACT: In this paper I discuss Pauline Melville's *The Ventriloquist's Tale* as a rewriting of Mario de Andrade's *Macunaima*. De Andrade based his novel on a translation of the Pemon myth by Koch-Gruenberg. Pauline Melville in her turn rewrites *Macunaima* based on a (mis)translation of the Brazilian work into English. Therefore relevant questions regarding translation, representation and miscegenation of Amerindian people are proposed by both works.

KEYWORDS: Macunaima; The Ventriloquist's Tale; representation; translation.

RESUMO: Neste trabalho eu discuto a obra *The Ventriloquist's Tale* da escritora britânica Pauline Melville como uma reescritura de *Macunaíma* do brasileiro Mario de Andrade. Se Mario de Andrade baseou-se em uma tradução do mito indígena feita por Koch-Grunberg, Pauline Melville responde a *Macunaíma* baseada em uma tradução da obra brasileira para o inglês. Portanto, questões de tradução, representação dos ameríndios são inevitáveis quando se exploram tanto a obra brasileira como a britânica

PALAVRAS-CHAVES: Macunaíma; The Ventriloquist's Tale; representação; tradução.

⁷² Part of this work has been presented at the Congress "Literature and Translation" (Monash University, Melbourne, Australia – 12-12 July 2011). An earlier version of this work has been presented at GOING CARIBBEAN Congress (Faculdade de Letras -Lisbon- November 2-4, 2009) by Miguel Nenevé and Rose Siepamann.

In Pauline Melville's *The Ventriloquist Tale*, the young Amerindian boy, Bla-Bla dies because of a problem in the translation of Amerindian words. An American worker, wishing to warn the boy about an explosion, pronounces the name of the boy's father and instead of avoiding the accident he just does the opposite. In this work we propose to discuss issues of representation and rewriting of Amerindian myths, especially those involving the myth of Macunaima or Makonaima in both Brazilian and Guyanese works. So we also explore the connections that one can see between Guyanese work *The Ventriloquist's Tale* by Pauline Melville and the Brazilian 'rhapsody' *Macunaima* by Mario de Andrade. We are especially interested in studying Pauline Melville's *The Ventriloquist Tale* as a rewriting of Mario de Andrade's *Macunaima* which is in turn a 'translation' of Amerindian myth. There are differences in the way both authors conceive miscegenation, representations of myth and Amerindian culture. However, there are clear similarities between the two works which must be explored. Both Mario de Andrade's and Melville's novels explore Amerindian themes but in different times and from a different perspective as they involve different interests and proposals, so they offer different translation of the Amerindian.

The relation between the Guyanese and the Brazilian work, as far as we know, is explored by only few critics, among them Albert Braz from the University of Alberta and April Shamak from the University of Maryland. However, we argue that the link between the two novels should not be ignored, particularly if we consider *The Ventriloquist Tale* published in 1997, a writing back to *Macunaima*, published in 1928.

Macunaima, Mario de Andrade's protagonist (1928), "a hero with no character" is born in the Brazilian Northern region, in the state of Roraima, in the deep forest, near Guyana: "In a far corner of Northern Brazil, at an hour when so deep a hush had fallen on the virgin forest that the brawling of the Uraricoera River could be heard, an Indian woman of the

Tapanhuma tribe gave birth to an unlovely son, [...]” (3).⁷³ Besides having Indigenous blood, the hero is an amalgam of many races and beliefs, like any Brazilian is supposed to be. As the narrator says “his skin was black as calcined ivory” (3). His two brothers, however, have different colors, one being half black and the other white. The boy Macunaima shows his special nature from birth. From childhood on he starts playing tricks on his mother, brothers and sister-in-law, Sofará. He marries Ci, the Mother of the Forest, who dies of sadness upon losing their only son. Before dying, though, Ci gives the hero a green stone amulet or *muiraquitã*, which brings him power as “Emperor of the Forest” as well as luck. Yet the amulet falls into the river and is swallowed by a turtle. Macunaíma and his brothers then travel from the Amazon to São Paulo in order to recover the amulet which is now with the colonizer Venceslau Petro Pietra, a Peruvian with an Italian name. He represents the foreigner who comes to Brazil for profit and fun. This character, also known as Piaíma,⁷⁴ will cause problems to Macunaima.

Mario de Andrade’s hero undergoes a series of physical and psychological transformations but at the end he gets tired and decides to ascend to heaven to become a constellation (Andrade 1987, 134). First, however, he tells his story to a parrot, who tells the story to the author of the book: “in the silence of Uraricoera only the parrot had rescued from oblivion those happenings and the language which had disappeared. Only the parrot had preserved in that vast silence the works and the deeds of the hero... “(168).⁷⁵

So, as one can see, *Macunaima*, incorporating Amerindian stories and words, may be read as a representation of Indigenous myths based on the work written by the Anthropologist Theodor Koch-Gruenberg. There are many passages of de Andrade’s *Macunaima* which are

⁷³ “No fundo da mata virgem nasceu Macunaima, herói da nossa gente. Era preto retinto e filho do medo da noite. Houve um momento em que o silêncio foi tão grande escutando o murmurejo do Uraricoera, que a índia tapanhumas pariu uma criança feia” (13)

⁷⁴ Neil Whitehead in his work *Dakr Shamans: Kanaima and the Poetics of violent death* (2002) discusses Pia as related to Kanaima and its misrepresentation in colonial sources (43-45)

⁷⁵ “E só o papagaio no silencio do Uraricoera preservava do esquecimento os casos e a fala desaparecida. Só o papagaio conservava no silencio as frases e feitos do herói.” (135)

legends of the Pemon myth. For the sake of example, we would like to quote the following passages:

a) From Koch-Gruenberg`s text:

When Makonaíma was still a boy, he would cry all night long and would ask his oldest brother`s wife to take him outside of the house. There he wanted to secure her and force her. His mom wanted to take him out, but he didn`t want her to. His mom told his sister-in-law to take him. She carried him out, for quite a distance, but he asked her to take him even farther. Then the woman took him even farther, until they were behind a wall. Makonaíma was still a boy. But when they arrived there, he turned into a man and he forced her...
(46)

b) from Mario de Andrade`s text:

...the next day he [Macunaíma] waited, watching with half an eye for his mother to start work, then he begged her to stop weaving split cane into a basket, so she asked her daughter-in-law, Jiguê`s wife, to take the little boy. Jiguê`s wife was a nice girl called Sofará who came rather apprehensively; but Macunaíma was behaving himself; and didn`t try to put his hand where he oughtn`t.....But... he transformed himself into a comely prince. There they made love... many times.

One could say that the Brazilian author rewrites or “translates” the Amerindian myth within a political and artistic interest. The “hero with no character” reveals he is a product of miscegenation of races: his skin is darker than that of his fellow tribesmen and, as he grows older, he gets an adult's body and a child's head. With the help of some magic, he becomes white. He is a wanderer, never belonging to any place in Brazil, going from the North to the South and back, crossing the border to Guyana sometimes, speaking different accents of Portuguese language.

Mario de Andrade wrote to the literary critic Alceu Amoroso Lima, about his own work:

I decided to write then because I was overcome with lyric emotion when upon reading Koch-Grünberg I realized that Macunaíma was a hero without any character either moral or psychological, I found this hugely moving, I don't know why, surely because of the newness of the fact, or because he so fully suited to our times, I don't know. (Lopes, 1974: 400-401)

One can see that the Brazilian author confirms that the “character” with “no character” suited to the time he was writing, a time to refuse European influence and write about a “real Brazilian character”, with no specific race, adaptable to any circumstances and capable of deceiving colonizing impositions coming from Europe.

Guyana is a very clear part of the character's world: “When he hauled in the next fish, the hero, with heroic spurt of energy, gave the rod a prodigious flick that threw the fish right over the border of Guyana.” (151)⁷⁶. Sometimes he mentions the “Terra dos Ingleses”, “English people's land”, which was also translated as Guyana: “ So all the parrots flew off to

⁷⁶ “Quando peixe pegou, Macunaíma fez um esforço heróico, deu um bruto arranco na vara de formas que o impulso fez o peixe ir parar lá na Guiana.” (122-123)

eat corn in Guyana, but first changed themselves into parakeets because, as they say, the parrots eat corn, but the parakeets takes blame.” (156)⁷⁷

Therefore, it is interesting to note that Mario de Andrade’s protagonist goes beyond the Brazilian borders and includes cultural and historical elements that belong to the whole South America. Wandering, escaping from dangers, looking for happiness and preparing tricks he does not respect the borders: “The brothers took to the trail again and roamed throughout the imperial domain. “ (28)⁷⁸. Besides Guyana and Venezuela, as borders to Roraima, the book presents Peru, Bolivia, Argentina and French Guyana as places which belong to his wandering imagination and the narrative extends itself wherever Pei, the sun, is the best guide. “Macunaíma spurred the dappled gray, and farther on, near Mendoza in Argentina, after nearly bumping into a galley slave also in flight, having escaped from French Guyana...”(100)⁷⁹

Mario de Andrade’s trickster can be viewed as a representation of Brazilian multicultural characteristics and its South American environment. It is important to note that Macunaima was produced in a modernist period, a time of optimism about miscegenation in Brazilian culture. To mix is good; to mix is part of the growing of the nation. The fact, for example that Macunaima is black may be noted as an interesting point, once he was born from the Amerindian tribe of Tapanhumas. It seems that the author’s intention was really to mix Indigenous, with black and white.⁸⁰ The language, the beliefs, legends and myths are mixed from the South to the North of Brazil. “Negrinho do Pastoreio” a legendary figure in Rio

⁷⁷ “Então todos os papagaios foram comer milho na terra dos ingleses. Porém, primeiro viraram periquitos porque assim, comias e os periquitos levavam a fama”. (126)

⁷⁸ “E os manos bateram pe na estrada outra vez, varando os domínios imperiais.” (24)

⁷⁹ “Macunaima esporeou o cordão-pedres e depois de perto de Mendonza na Argentina quase dar um esbarrão num galé que também vinha fugindo da Guiana Francesa, chegou num lugar onde uns padres estavam melando.” (84)

⁸⁰ In the film *Macunaima* Pedro de Andrade uses Grande Otello, a black artist to play the hero.

Grande do Sul, appears playing tricks in the North. Besides, the Southern expression “piá”, to mean “boy” is used even in the Northeast. It is also important to note the anecdote about the Northeastern Brazilian people as having the “cabeça chata”, in other words, flat head. These people go to Sao Paulo to earn their living.

The baby had the typical flattened head of the Northerner, and to flatten it even more Macunaima used to pat it every day, saying to the tiny tot, “ Grow up quickly, son of mine, and go to São Paulo to make oodles of money. “ (20)⁸¹

Therefore, Mario de Andrade’s *Macunaima* may be read as symbol of the good miscegenation of races and cultures. In certain ways it praises the hybridism which is considered a characteristic of Brazil and South America. For a long time, before writing *Macunaima*, Mario de Andrade had been studying the works related to Brazilian culture, uses and customs. In 1926 he wrote to Augusto Meyer that he knew every kind of legend registered and even those not registered in Brazil” (Batista, 12). He had already read some of the works of the Ethnologist Koch-Gruenberg and had translated the chapters related to Music and indigenous legends. It was here that he found the sources for his *Macunaima*. In 1927, with the work ready and being revised, he visited the region where Koch-Gruenberg had visited. Therefore, as we have stated previously, the origin of Mario de Andrade’s work is the Pemon mythology⁸², based on the work of the German Koch-Gruenberg, collected in the second volume of *Vom Roraima zum Orinoco* (1924). One can say that what Mario de Andrade did was already a translation of the anthropologist’s work, which, in its turn, was already a “translation” of the Pemon culture. In addition to the work of Koch-Gruenberg, Mario de Andrade uses, as a source for *Macunaima*, characters and some plots from the

⁸¹ “O pecurrucho tinha cabeça chata e Macunaíma inda a achatava mais batendo nela todos os dias e falando pro guri. Meu filho, cresce depressa pra você ir pra Sao Paulo ganhar muito dinheiro”. (21)

⁸² Pemon people comprehend the Amerindian living near the Mountain Roraima, among them, the Macuxis.

Amazonian folklorist Raymundo de Moraes as well as from Capistrano de Abreu and others (SA, 2).

Referring to representation of the myth, Neil L. Whitehead, in his work *Dark Shamans* (2002) affirms that Makonaima was the first man, who with Piai´ma originated the World. The author explains:

Makonaima has conventionally been interpreted as a senior brother, he was even given the characteristics of the Christian God, because of his role as creator of plants and animals, when the missionaries were undertaken their first evangelization and translating the bible...The name Makonaima means the great evil (makuy means evil, bad, , “ima” means great, ultimate (98)

This information about Makonaima seems to be a little different from the sources Mario de Andrade uses for his novels. One observes, however, that there are many moments of dispute and vengeance which remind the reader of the translation of “kanaima”. Macunaima, the Brazilian contradictory character, has the good and evil together . He himself reveals a revengeful spirit, on many occasions, even against his brothers. This is based on Koch-Gruenberg writing about the Pemon in which “being evil” and “being a culture hero” do not have to result in a contradiction, as in so many studies about tricksters. As Lucia de Sá (2008) contends, Macunaima is a trickster and his restlessness and creativity seem to suggest, for the Pemon, that “ adaptability and capacity of transformation are more important attributes of a culture hero than rigid conceptions of bad and good”(10).

Mario de Andrade admitted his intention in using Amerindian myth for artistic purposes. In a letter to Drummond de Andrade, written in 1928, he says, “ I have an artistic interest in them. Now and again they do amazing things. Certain ceramic bowls form the north...” (3) So the author “translates” the Amerindian myth within a political and artistic

context. As professor Sergio Luiz Prado Bellei (1998) from the University of Santa Catarina argues, the purpose of *Macunaima* was establishing a Brazilian identity, it was part of a project to establish a national identity based on the primitive in reaction to the increased social disparities between the elite and the poor (89-90). The translation of the myth was, therefore, linked to the interest of his time, when Brazilian writers and intellectuals desired a national literature and a rupture from the European sources. We see here a clear example of the translation of the Pemon myth serving political interests. As Tulio Maranhao (2002) suggests “ the politics of translation refers to the fact that languages in any given historical time are organized into a hierarchy of power established by the relations among political units such as nation-states, monarchies, tribes, ...” (64). Mario de Andrade was living in an important period of Brazilian history, the period between the two wars, a period when people felt the necessity to know the national characteristics, a time when one needed to make his or her own form of expression and a time for searching national “roots”. In The Modernist movement, for example, especially in São Paulo, the national theme was always present in pictures, music and conference. Mario de Andrade himself lectured on arts in Brazil and he always defended the necessity of knowing the “national elements”. He traveled to several regions and places in Brazil in order to register several expressions of art in the country.⁸³ Some critics even believe that Mario de Andrade's race and family served as background for his work *Macunaima*.

We have argued that the context in which *Macunaima* was produced is interesting and we also contend that the context of its translation into English must be noted too. The English translation of *Macunaima* was achieved by E. A. Goodland and published only in 1985, much after de Andrade's death. It must be noted that the translation was dedicated to a Guyanese woman, Edwina Melville, Pauline Melville's relative. Moreover, it seems that the

⁸³ His travels were important for his research and also for his travelogue published in O Diario Nacional in 1927. It was a column which served as an introduction for cosmopolites to indigenous Brazil. This column also published a number of photograph showing the landscape and people throughout Brazil . This works would help to construct *Macunaima*.

translator had Guyana in mind when he translated the Brazilian work. In the following passage, in the original work, referring to different foods and drinks, the narrator says that there was an imitation of Port Wine from Minas: “Os vinhos eram um Puro de Ica subidor vindo de Iaquitos, um Porto imitação, de Minas...” The translator chose to put it in this way: “The wines were a costly Puro de Ica from Iquitos Correia’s genuine Spanish Port from Georgetown...”(44). It is known that Correia used to be the name of the best wine producer in Guyana. The translator must have had some reason to mention this name which is not in the original. Before discussing Pauline Melville’s rewriting of *Macunaima* we would like to point out other issues related to the English translation.

We can begin with the subtitle of the Brazilian version of this novel which is omitted in the English translation. Andrade describes his protagonist as a "hero without any character [heroi sem nenhum carater]" (1987, n.p.). Further the English version has some expressions which do not really correspond to the original. For example, *Macunaima* repeats throughout the book the phrase “ Ai que preguiça” , which could be translated as “ Ah, such laziness!” However, it was translated as 'Aw, what a fucking life!' (4). This phrase is uttered throughout the text whenever the hero, *Macunaima*, is supposed to take action. Throughout Andrade’s rhapsody one also sees many references to the ants and the to hero makes the prophet-like pronouncement: "Pouca saúde e muita saúva, os males do Brasil são!" (1987, 56) which could be translated as “ Poor health and too many ants are the ills of Brazil.” This is a slogan that fuses two celebrated phrases in Brazilian cultural history, which suggest that, unless Brazil is able to control the insects that destroy crops and undermine the health of its people, it will never be able to achieve its potential. In Goodland’s translation, however, the phrase turns into "With fewer ants and better health / Brazil will lead the world in wealth!" That is, the translator changed the concept for a more futuristic view of Brazil. Pauline

Melville probably read this translation of Andrade's work which would be the basis for her creation.

The Ventriloquist's Tale is the first novel by Pauline Melville and was published in 1997. Set in Guyana's capital Georgetown and in the Guyanese savannah, on the frontiers of Brazil where Brazil and Brazilian characters are always present, *The Ventriloquist Tale* rewrites canonical works and reveals the damage that colonialism and capitalism caused to the people of the region. There are two stories that run parallel in the novel. One is the story of an incestuous relationship caused by the eclipse, in the 1920s, when two mixed-race siblings, Beatrice and Danny, fell in love to each other and live as husband and wife, unsuspected. When they were found out they have to stop their relationship. Danny then marries a Brazilian woman and Beatrice goes to Canada in order to start a new life there. Here, one can see that similarly to *Macunaima*, where one has to go to the South in order to survive, the girl goes to the North, a place where one has a chance to live safer.

The other story is set in the present-day Guyana. In this thread of the novel, Choffy McKinnon, Beatrice and Danny's nephew, is forced to leave the savannah and go to Georgetown to earn needed cash--an indication that the indigenous communities are no longer completely self-sufficient but depend on the global capitalist economy. (Again, one sees migration for economic reasons similar to what Brazilian *Macunaima* suggests). In the capital, Choffy meets Rosa Mendelson, an English academic, with whom he has an affair. The academic is researching Evelyn Waugh's journey to Guyana in the 1930s. Then the novel reveals a little of Waugh, possessed of "a pushed-up face and little pebble eyes," had stayed with the McKinnons, and forced Danny in particular to listen to hour after hour of *Dombey and Son*--a brilliant spin on Waugh's reportage from the Amazonia, not to mention his novel *A Handful of Dust*. In the end, Bla-Bla, Choffy and Marietta's son dies and Choffy has to leave Georgetown and return to the village and re-start a new life with his family

In the epilogue, the narrator Chico, like in Andrade's *Macunaima*, returns to a constellation in the sky, but hesitates to give the reader his name. "It is Macun . . . No. I've changed my mind. But yes, I will tell you the story of the parrot. Another time" (357). Therefore, one can say that *The Ventriloquist's Tale* goes from past to present and offers up a vision on Guyana's colonial past and present, superstition versus rationalism, blindness versus sight.

The connection between the Brazilian and the Guyanese (British) texts is undeniable from the beginning to the end of the novel. In the prologue, the narrator of *The Ventriloquist's Tale* evokes the Brazilian work, "Spite impels me to relate that my biographer, the noted Brazilian Senhor Mario Andrade (sic), got it wrong when he consigned me to the skies in such a slapdash and cavalier manner(1). From the beginning the reader sees that the book will in some way criticize the Brazilian representation of the myth. It seems that Melville's narrator is suggesting that Andrade mistranslated Amerindian culture.

Melville, by inducing a relationship between her text and the Brazilian one in some way "translates back" Mario de Andrade's work and *Macunaima's* story. The Guyanese narrator who is unidentified but could be Chico or "Macu..." invites the reader to his homeland, "that belongs to the Indians in either side of the Kanaku Mountains north of the Amazon..." (9). The Guyanese work suggests that Amerindian culture and myth are complex and difficult to be represented. No one can tell whether what he or she hears is "the truth". Melville's narrator informs us when introducing himself: "Where I come from it's not done to give your real name too easily ... We, in this part of the world, have a special veneration for the lie . . . We treat the lie seriously, as a form of horticulture, to be tended and nurtured, all its little tendrils to be encouraged" (3). The narrator thus seems to undermine the truth-value of the realist story and proposes that the Amerindians live in an untranslatable world. So one can ask what is real and what is invention, creation or fiction when we write about

Amerindian culture. It is undeniable that, unlike the Brazilian author, the Guyanese proposes a much more open and diverse view of Amerindians and indigeneity. The book presents, for example, different versions of the myths, such as Macunaima and the eclipse, among Amerindians: “We have a different version, said one of the Taruma from where his hammock hung in the gloom. We say that the brother became the sun and she became the moon.” (194). Macunaima, is also told and retold from different perspectives: “His sons Macunaima and Chico are searching for him everywhere [...]” (184).

Moreover, one can say that *The Ventriloquist's Tale* suggests that the story depends on who is telling it. Indigenous culture is not unique and besides, is in a constant metamorphosis. That is why it is untranslatable, it always depends on what one is thinking and from what perspective one is analyzing the problem. April Shemak (2005) claims that by presenting a narrator who is not who he claims to be, and who has no intention of revealing himself to us, “Melville disrupts the notion of ‘native informants’ as purveyors of cultural truths” (101). As we have mentioned before, the narrator tells the reader that what he is telling may be just lies and one cannot rely on any translation.

The transformation of life-style for the Amerindian and for the Indigenous people in general is visible in Melville's work: “Look at this shop. Before it opened, people used to fish and share everything with the other families here. Now they take the fish to sell in Georgetown for money to buy things in the shop.” (55). One sees a degradation of life caused, maybe, by the invasion of a capitalist way of life in the country. The American Hawk Oil company which ends being the cause of an Amerindian death is one example of this invasion in the country, in the name of development. Revealing a very clear postcolonial position, Melville's work presents Religion as another way of colonizing and causing the Amerindian world to fall apart, bringing death and disharmony to the region. Father Napier (110) is one example of a colonizer who disrespect and ignores the culture of the Amerindian people. The

mention of incident in Jonestown (55), although brief, is also very significant as a critique of religion and colonialism.

Like *Macunaima*, *The Ventriloquist's Tale* suggests that the disintegration of the Indigenous life is something inevitable. At the end of the Brazilian work, for example, we read that “an immense silence slumbers over the riverbanks of the Uraricoera” because the Tapahumas disappeared with their language and customs. In Melville's work it seems the Amerindian will also disappear, (“we are destroyed if we mix”, 55). The disappearance of the nation seems unavoidable, because there is no way of stopping race miscegenation. Mackinnon who is British and lives in the Savannah is already seen as an inferior because he acquires the Amerindian style of life:

In Georgetown, the gossip was that McKinnon was now more Indian than European. The upper classes of the colony despised him when he arrived from the bush in a leather vaquero hat. They reserved for him that particular hatred which colonists have for one who they feel has betrayed his race and class.
(100)

Shemak” (2005) argues that the work of the Guyanese Pauline Melville, *The Ventriloquist's Tale* offers a critique of the Brazilian modernist Mário de Andrade, who appropriated Amerindian myths of Brazil to construct a Brazilian national identity in his 1928 novel *Macunaíma*. *The Ventriloquist's Tale* invites us to think on the difficult task to translate or represent one culture. Nothing is so simple, and the Amerindian culture and myth are so complex, no one can tell or represent as truth. The American scholar contends that “Melville uses elements of the myth to complicate facile constructions of indigeneity as “pure” and “authentic” ... (92) .According to this critic, unlike Mario de Andrade that appropriates

European modern art, Melville uses the myth of Macunaima” to signify the constant metamorphosis experienced by indigenous people.

What we argue here, however, is that the Amerindian people play an important role in making Brazil-Guyana connection in literature possible. Amerindian are the ones who make this bridge, they promote the border crossing in order to visit other spaces, they are the people who go from one country to the other with no fear of borders.

If, as April Shemak claims, Melville’s novel is a critique and a response to Mario de Andrade translation of the myth Makonaima, one can also say that Melville’s work is a rewriting of *Macunaima*. There would not be a *Ventriloquist’s Tale* the way it is, without a *Macunaima*. Through the Brazilian modernist work de Andrade seems to be looking to define what was to be modern in a peripheral society. So *Macunaima* may suggest the possibility of blending races and culture as way of decolonizing Brazilian people. Playing trick may also be a very important strategy to face of the problem caused by of colonization. In response to this idea, Melville’s *The Ventriloquist’s Tale* suggests that the only way the Amerindian people of the savannah of Guyana can survive as a distinct group is by isolating themselves from the outside world, avoiding mixture with other cultures. April Shemak claims that “Melville’s portrayal of Macunaima differs so markedly from Andrade’s is that, ultimately, she does not seem to believe in the cultural and racial multiplicity embodied by her trickster. “

We agree that one difference between Melville text and Mario de Andrade’s is “the way in which indigenous culture serves the nation.” Melville’s narrator introduces himself as, “Rumbustious, irrepressible, adorable me. I have black hair, bronze skin and I would look wonderful in a cream suit with a silk handkerchief. . .”(1) Then he completes “My name translated means ‘one who works in the dark’. You can call me Chico. It’s my brother’s name but so what. Where I come from it’s not done to give your real name too easily (1). Mario de

Andrade's hero also tells many lies and deceives people on several occasions and sometimes, in order to play the innocent one, he confesses his lies. However, the narrator of the Brazilian story does not suggest that he is telling lies and so the narrative seems to be more reliable than the Guyanese.

Another important question that one may detect in Melville's work is to what extent we can translate the culture of the other. The mistranslation may cause the death of Amerindian people. For instance, the Americans working for Oil Company in Guyana got involved in an episode that reveal the catastrophic consequence a mistranslation can cause. One of the workers saw Bla-bla, the little boy, Choffy's son, in the area where the explosion was about to occur and he pointed to the danger spot shouting: 'Chofoye. Chofoye.' He said he was trying to warn the boy, believing that "Chofoye" was an Amerindian word for explosion. Bla-Bla must have misunderstood and ran towards the spot because he thought his father had come home. He ran, in fact, towards the explosion and ended gravely injured, dying later. Tenga, Choffy's cousin says: "The stupid Americans didn't even realize he spoke English-- let alone we all have different languages anyway" (343-44)

Therefore Bla-Bla's death is a clear warning about the problem one may cause when assumes that he or she is able to translate another culture. The American's superficial knowledge of the language was used totally out of the context and caused the death of the Amerindian boy. The book suggests that one must be very careful when translating other's culture as it is very dangerous to assume to know when you are not aware of the whole context.

Besides dismantling the translatability of a culture, Melville suggests that one cannot rely on the native informants. They may be telling their versions of the stories, or they may be even telling lies. In this sense the novel satirizes those who use Indigenous culture as profitable objects. As Shemak argues, "As a ventriloquist who merely repeats a story, he

does not run the risk of again reproducing the native as an object for consumption.” (103) So Melville proposes that there are many versions of Macunaima and it depends on the context and on who is telling or rather translating. In this sense the Guyanese novel differs from the Brazilian modernist narrative. Mario de Andrade presents the “hero with no character” suggesting that Brazilians have no character as “the hero” cannot decide either for a tropical (Vei, the Sun) or for the European culture. As *Macunaima*’s author explains in a special note : “by the word “character” I do not mean only a moral reality, but I understand the psychic permanent entity.” Having no character then Macunaíma has no fix identity because he is not whole Amerindian.

In Pauline Melville’s text, however, even the fact of being totally Amerindian does not mean having one identity, but several individualities because there are several Indigenous Nations each one with its own distinct culture.

Moreover, if we go further in exploring the comparison of the Brazilian modernist work with the British (and Guyanese) postmodern one, we will perceive easily that the political impetus is clearer in *The Ventriloquist’s Tale* than in *Macunaima*. Melville’s work can be read, as we suggested previously, as a postcolonial text because it proposes revising, rereading and rewriting European canonical texts, such as Charles Darwin’s *The Origins of Species*: “anyway, according to my grandmother, Charles Darwin without so much as a by-your-leave parked behind my ancestors and wrote the first line of *Origin of species*, declaring that we were descended from monkeys.” (3). *The Ventriloquist’s Tale* offers the reader other examples of “writing back” to canonical authors and their texts. The most important author to be “responded” is the very well known British writer Evelyn Waugh who visited South America, especially Guyana, and wrote about the country.

One of Melville’s characters is an English literary scholar named Rosa Mendelson. She travels to Guyana to do research on the British author: “her research was on Evelyn

Waugh's attitude towards the colonies" (44). Further on we learn that the title of her monograph was "'Evelyn Waugh -- a Post-colonial Perspective' as "she wrote on the front of her notebook as the plane flew.." (351). Through Rosa Mendelson, Melville revises one of Waugh's most celebrated narratives about Guyana, present both in the short story "The Man who Liked Dickens" and in the novel *A Handful of Dust* (207-21). As a postcolonial writer Melville, through Mendelson, is able to offer a counter discourse to the colonial discourse visible in Waugh's texts: "nobody really knew what the hell he was doing there. Danny McKinnon, Wifreda's brother, was obliged to sit and listen to him reading out loud for hours..." (49) According to the narrator of the *Ventriloquist's Tale*, Waugh disregarded Guyana's history and culture. Wifreda comments: " I don't know why Mr. Waugh didn't write about that. He certainly Knew about it" (49)

If Mario de Andrade collects myth and legends around Brazil, Pauline Melville invites the reader to visit Guyanese History from a postcolonial perspective: "From early on in its history, there had been something pale about the city of Stabroek, as Georgetown was known in the eighteenth century. It was as if the architecture and builders had attempted to subdue that part of the coast with a geometry to which it was not suited..." (35). Melville's narrator also retells the history of evangelization and religious colonization of the Rupununi area (Brazil – Guyana border) through Father Napier. The Father's fanatic and narrow-minded attitudes towards Amerindians is satirized by the narrator:

Father Napier developed an intense crush on one of these boys, whom he called Little Ignatius. Little Ignatius was slow, serious and shy. When Father Napier praised him, he lowered his eyes and flushed, not knowing how to respond. The priest saw this as a charming sign of humility in the boy and saw him as a symbol of the Advent of real Christianity in the savannah. (149)

Father Napier pushed the Amerindian boy hard and later on we learn that the young Wapisiana dies on the Mountain, a “special place” where Father should never have taken the boy. Father Napier can only say that “Little Ignatius is safely in the arms of Christ now. (153) Therefore, while Mario de Andrade’s *Macunaíma* satirizes Brazilian “lack of character”, Melville’s main satirical target is the European colonizer in Guyana.

Moreover, in de Andrade’s *Macunaíma* one sees that adaptability to any different situation or circumstance is an important quality. The hero reveals to be very pragmatic and creative even in front of the “progress”, in São Paulo which is so much different from his Uraricoera in the Amazon. *Macunaíma* “maquina” (a Brazilian verb that means think) and concludes that “Humans were machines and machines were humans! (36)”. As Lucia Sa Correia (2008) maintains, free, *Macunaíma* can then have his first experience dominating the machine: “as he had always done in the region of the Uraricoera, where he was born as a hero and had become the “Emperor of the forest” (11). One sees that from this perspective, adaptability and capacity of transformation are more important attributes of the Amerindians than an inflexible conception of the world. The lack of rigidity may be a way of survival. In Pauline Melville’s novel, however progress is seen as an imposition which comes to destroy Amerindian lives. Tenga, an Amerindian personage, Choffy’s cousin, affirms that Amerindians are destroyed because of the mixture of races. He reflects with certain bitterness: We Amerindians people are fools, you know. We’ve been colonized twice. First by the Europeans and then by the coastlanders... (54). Further on, he explains how “progress” and invasion of other culture has destroyed their lives. As a postcolonial writer, through *The Ventriloquist’s Tale* Melville criticizes even the scholars who visit the Amerindian tribes: “scholars come and worm their way into our communities, studying us and grabbing our

knowledge for their own benefit. Aid agencies come and interfere with us.” (54). The novel gives the reader the opportunity to think about the conflict between the forces of economic development and environmental preservation of the Amazon.

However, it is important to pay attention to the similarities between the two works too. Both Andrade and Melville introduce to the reader the Amazonian trickster, Macunaima, the protagonist of Andrade's "rhapsody" and the narrator of Melville's *The Ventriloquist's Tale*. So, as suggested previously, the link between Guyanese and Brazilian literature is possible because of the Amerindian people. As Albert Braz (2007) of the University of Alberta, contends

The link between the two works is the Amazonian trickster who is the eponymous protagonist of Andrade's 1928 "rhapsody" and the narrator of (at least part of) Melville's novel. Yet, what an examination of the two texts also underscores is Melville's apparent ambivalence toward her mischievous narrator. Andrade's *Macunaima* is, on the often seen as the symbol of the cultural and racial hybridism...(3)

Braz further suggests that Pauline Melville, through her work *The Ventriloquist's Tale*, besides writing back to a variety of metropolitan or canonic texts, written by writers such as “Darwin and Freud to Levi-Strauss and, most explicitly, Evelyn Waugh”, also writes back to Mario de Andrade's work (2). In fact, the intertextual relationship with Mario de Andrade's *Macunaima* can be observed at the prologue of the Guyanese work. *The Ventriloquist's Tale* explores the effects of both of these in her dark--and often deeply funny--narrative of forbidden love and the clash of cultures.

Andrade's *Macunaima* ends with the cryptic revelation that "the words and the deeds of the hero" are preserved by a green parrot (Andrade 1985, 168). Similarly, Melville's

narrator, who is never fully identified, closes *The Ventriloquist's Tale* with a teaser : "Now that I'm leaving I will let you into the secret of my name.... I will tell you later..."(357)

Moreover one could say that knowledge of Andrade's Brazilian (Portuguese) text would provide Melville with another view of the Brazilian work (because she based her writing on a translation). Even being a postcolonial and postmodern work, different from Andrade's perspective, perhaps we may disagree with April Shemak (2005) and contend that there are more similarities between de Andrade's and Melville's works than there are differences.

As pointed out by Albert Braz (2007), April Shemak who devotes attention to translation theory, ignores the fact that Melville is not interpreting Andrade's work but an English (mis)translation of it. Thus, her conclusion that Melville's "multiple reinventions of Macunaima [...] reveal the untranslatability of language and culture becomes unintentionally ironic" (369).

Finally, it is interesting to observe the translation of Melville into Portuguese. The Guyanese work *The Ventriloquist's Tale* becomes *A História do Ventriloquo*. Beti Vieira's translation seems to be a careful work, with important footnotes for the Brazilian readers, as for example, when she explains that the "marmite bottles" (Melville *The Ventriloquist's Tale*, 16) refers to a trade mark of a British concentrated food (Melville's *O conto do Ventriloquo*, 22). When referring to Jonestown (*The Ventriloquist's Tale*, 53) the translator also explains in a footnote that this is a reference to the place where the followers of Reverend Jim Jones lived and died. It seems that the translator is very careful to clarify something not so clear to the Brazilian readers.

However, it is surprising how the translator neglects the Brazilian work *Macunaima* when she translates Melville's *The Ventriloquist's Tale*. She ignores the mistranslation of "Ai que preguiça" an expression which appears already in the prologue of Melville's work "Ai que preguiça"

All I ever said was: what a fucking life!” becomes “ Tudo que eu dizia era: “Ai que saco de vida!”. The translator does not make any footnote, nothing to remind the Brazilian reader that Melville was reading a (mis)translation of *Macunaima*. We would like to argue that as a Brazilian translator, Vieira should pay attention to the connection between Mario de Andrade’s and Melville’s works, or to the connection between Brazilian and Guyanese literatures. The Brazilian translator had the opportunity to translate back Mario de Andrade’s work and comment on the mistranslation into English. She, however, preferred to be “faithful” only to the original *The Ventriloquist’s Tale*, apparently ignoring that visible link between the Brazilian and the Guyanese work. We claim that Pauline Melville, besides writing back to European canonical texts, as stated previously, “writes back” to the Brazilian story, presenting a more complex indigenous world, in this way “translating back” a representation of the *Macunaima* myth.

Melville’s response to the Brazilian work is visible. The “Macu” who hides his conscience in order to avoid burdening it is really present in the Guyanese novel reminding the Mario de Andrade’s readers of different perspectives from one can read the Amerindian myths, the encounter between “civilized and native” and the miscegenation of races.

In conclusion, even with these problems of failure in translation one can argue that the bridge that links Brazilian to British and Guyanese literature should not be ignored by readers and critics. Pauline Melville’s *The Ventriloquist’s Tale* should be read as a rewriting of Mario de Andrade’s *Macunaima* and as a good perception of Brazil and the South-American context.

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