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José de Alencar's *Iracema* and the Ambiguities of Writing as Translation

José de Alencar's work occupies a special place in the history of the Brazilian novel. Alencar was one of the founders of novelistic practice in the country (Sommer 140), and the author of two of Brazil's most beloved narratives: *O Guarani* (1857) and, the subject of this essay, *Iracema* (1865). These two novels deal with interracial loves between Amerindians and Portuguese colonizers. *O Guarani*, as part of its complicated plot, narrates the platonic love affair between a male Amerindian and a Portuguese woman. *Iracema*, the subject of this essay, describes the relationship between an Amerindian woman and a Portuguese soldier. Because both novels represent the contact between the conquering Portuguese and the native inhabitants of what is now Brazil, they have been read as attempts to discover what constitutes the basic characteristics of the Brazilian nation. In other words, they have been interpreted as literature about national identity (Wasserman 190; Sommer 140-41).

While *O Guarani* is closer to the patterns of the nineteenth century European novel (Wasserman 200), *Iracema* has the additional interest of being a "prose experiment."[1] Alencar designates the latter text as experimental because he describes it as a "translation" of images and ideas that originate in the Tupi language of the Brazilian Indians. He claims in the postscript to *Iracema*, the "Carta ao Dr. Jaguaribe," that:

> Sem dúvida que o poeta brasileiro tem de traduzir en sua lingua as idéias, embora rudes e grosseiras, dos indios; . . . é preciso que a língua civilizada se molde quanto possa à singeleza primitiva da língua bárbara; e não represente as imagens e pensamentos indígenas senão por termos e frases que ao leitor pareçam naturais na boca do selvagem (89).[2]

In this manner, Alencar presents *Iracema*, if not as a direct translation of any particular aboriginal "text," at least as an attempt at incorporating Amerindian modes of thinking and expression into the nineteenth century novel.

It is not surprising that Alencar's "translational" practice has been celebrated.[3] After all, unlike much Latin American literature, it presents itself as trying to include the Amerindian, not only as the subject matter of the text, but also as its principal formative element. It is possible to see in *Iracema*'s assimilation of Amerindian "images and thoughts" within a European language and literary genre, an early example of a literary practice that later would be called "transculturated" by Angel Rama, "heterogeneous" by Antonio Cornejo Polar, and praised by both authors.[4] Nevertheless, "translation," as a figure and as a practice, is much more ambivalent than some critics of Alencar in their celebratory stance have admitted. In this essay, I intend to concentrate on the ambiguities of translation, as explained by literary theory,[5] and as manifested in Alencar's own literary practice. Moreover, I will show how the contradictory elements present in the theory of translation, and in Alencar's "practice," can serve as a key to reading other contradictory aspects of the novel, especially those found at the level of the story.

Iracema narrates the romance between Martim Soares Moreno, a Portuguese soldier allied with the Pitiguara Amerindians, and Iracema, the daughter of a Tabajara Amerindian priest. Although Iracema is dedicated to the cult of Tupã—the highest deity of the Tupi—and expected to remain a virgin, she falls in love with the Portuguese soldier. After seducing him while he is under the influence of a hallucinatory potion, she escapes with him and Poti, Martim's Indian friend, to the coastal areas controlled by the Pitiguaras. To make matters worse, the Pitiguaras and the Tabajaras are enemies, even though they are presented as speaking the same language, and as having the same religion and traditions. At first, Iracema and Martim are happy together, but later he becomes nostalgic for Portugal. In order to assuage his nostalgia, he fights for the Pitiguaras, leaving Iracema for extended periods of time Even her pregnancy does not keep him at her side. Iracema slowly loses the will to live, but manages to give birth to a son, Moacir. Martim arrives in time to receive his son from the dying Iracema. Years later, Martim will return to colonize the area where he lived with Iracema, and Poti will convert to Catholicism and vow fidelity to the Portuguese crown. But a deep nostalgia for Iracema will characterize the rest of Martim's life.

Haroldo de Campos, the noted Brazilian theorist and poet, has proposed a laudatory reading of *Iracema* as a "translation." For him, in *Iracema*, Portuguese, the language of the former metropolis, becomes "'strange' by the influx of the Tupi paradigm" (15). Campos emphasizes the modernity of Alencar's "translational" practice, since "making" the target language "strange" by submitting it to the influence of the source language is a central concept in twentieth century thinking on translation (18). This concept is defended by Walter Benjamin in

"The Task of the Translator," perhaps the most celebrated essay in the field of translation theory. Nevertheless, it must be remembered that Benjamin's idea of a literal translation—which reproduces the syntax of the source text and the language in which it is written— is the radicalization of ideas maintained by Romantic and post-Romantic thinkers and writers who were Alencar's contemporaries. Benjamin admits implicitly the relationship between his own ideas and those held by the Romantics, who "more than any others, were gifted with an insight into the life of literary works which has its highest testimony in translation" (77). Among these earlier writers, Benjamin singles out Hölderlin as the "prototype" of translational practice (82).

Antoine Berman gives a description of Hölderlin's approach to translating which can be applied to Alencar's text. For Berman, Hölderlin's German translations are characterized by "speaking literal Greek"; a literalness that is also present at the syntactic and lexical levels (168). *Iracema* presents numerous examples of Portuguese being made to "speak literal Tupi"; for instance, the following sentence: "No centro estão os guerreiros do fogo, que trazem o raio" (78)—"In the middle are the fire-warriors, who carry the lighting" (89). "Guereiros do fogo"—fire warriors— replaces "white soldiers" or "Portuguese soldiers", and "o raio"—"lightning"—substitutes "muskets." The reader is able to understand the sentence, but it no longer reads like customary Portuguese. Commonplace words in the target language are replaced with what appear to be literal translations from Tupi. In this new linguistic context, these "translations" gain an added strangeness that enriches the text.

Iracema incorporates Tupi names at the lexical level, while at the syntactical level conventional Portuguese is also "made strange" by the

constant use of translations after a Tupi word. One example is the phrase:"Iracema, a virgem dos lábios de mel" (14)—"Iracema, the virgin with the honey lips" (3)— since, according to Alencar's own footnote, Iracema means "labios de mel"("honey lips") (12). Jacques Derrida has noted that a proper name is "la référence d'un signifiant pur à un existant singulier—et à ce titre intraduisible" (210).[6] Therefore, following a proper name with its "meaning" creates the effect of both translating and not translating. As a common noun, Iracema can be properly rendered in Portuguese as "lábios de mel," while as a proper noun it is impossible to translate. The net result of this practice of following a proper noun with its "translation" is to produce an untranslatable surplus and to make the reader aware of this. Thus, the reader is made to realize the falsity of the promise of total transparency which the Portuguese language, like every language, claims to hold.

Alencar's reiterated use of similes also helps "make strange" the Portuguese language. The following is one many possible examples: "Quando teu filho deixar o seio de Iracema, ela morrerá, como o abati depois que deu seu fruto" 76—"When the White Warrior's son has left the bosom of Iraçéma she will die, like the Abaty after it has yielded its fruit" (86).[7]. The simile, which includes the Tupi word for rice, "abati," expands on what is the main point of the sentence, that Iracema will die after giving birth, but also fulfills Alencar's attempt to use words that "seem natural in the mouth of a savage."

According to the laudatory reading of Alencar as "translator," he was influential in changing Portuguese from an exclusively European language into a Brazilian one. Doris Sommer sees in his work the beginning of a "linguistic emancipation" that reached its culmination in the resolution of the Brazilian Chamber of Deputies to call the national

language Brazilian in 1936 (155).[8] At the literary level, as Campos points out, *Iracema* is the beginning of a "philological revolution" in literature that culminates in the work of twentieth century Brazilian author Guimarães Rosa (21). For both critics, Alencar's work is not only ahead of its time, but establishes the basic patterns that Brazilian literature, according to Campos, and the Portuguese language in Brazil, according to Sommer, are going to follow into the twentieth century. Alencar's text seems to show that Berman's remarks, made while studying the translational theories and practices of German Romanticism, can be applied to Brazil: "the formulation and the development of a national culture of its own can and must proceed by way of translation, that is, by an intensive and deliberate relation to the foreign" (32). In *Iracema*'s case, however, the "foreign" is presented not only as the most Brazilian element in the national culture, but also as its origin.

By letting the "foreign" invade and permeate literary Portuguese, *Iracema* becomes a turning point in Brazilian literature and language. Portuguese, the target language, opens itself to the syntax and lexicon of the source language, Tupi. Furthermore, if we follow the Romantic notion in which a national culture must formulate itself and develop through its relation to the foreign, this opening to a foreign language becomes, not only the moment when Portuguese becomes Brazilian, but also when Brazilian culture emancipates itself from its colonial origin. Since the "foreign" in this case is the Brazilian Indian, one could talk about the "return of the repressed"—in both a historical and psychoanalytic sense—calling into question the language and culture of the conquerors. An additional twist is added by the fact that what is linguistically "foreign," the Tupi language, is, from a cultural, historical, geographical, and even racial point of view, seen by Alencar as the

source—"the fonte"— of Brazil (89).

But despite the favorable interpretation advanced by these critics, Alencar's "translational" practice is not lacking in ambiguities or contradictions. For instance, the Tupi words used in Alencar's novel are, as Campos writes, "invented" (19). In his linguistic inventions, Alencar takes into account the reader's expectations, what seems "to the reader natural in the mouth of savages." This lack of "authenticity" may not invalidate Alencar's aesthetic project, but it makes the apparently privileged position given to the Tupi language questionable. An example of this disregard for the source language can be found in the name Iracema. As I have pointed out, Alencar provides a Tupi etymology for the name, yet, at the same time the word is an anagram for "America." Although it is fitting for the word America to be present in the name of a character that represents allegorically the native American elements in the formation of Brazil, this fact also shows the manner in which the apparent fidelity to Tupi becomes just a cover for the traditional power of the colonizing language to rename at will what has already been named by the colonized language. An additional ironic touch can be found in the fact that the word "America" is itself European, created in honor of Amerigo Vespucci who may have never even visited the continent named after him (Todorov 100). Nevertheless, the name "Iracema" sounds Tupi to the Portuguese (or English) speaking reader. Alencar's utilization of Tupi in his "experiment" is compatible with exoticism. Rather than a true experience of the foreign, it gives the reader an experience mediated by his or her expectations, and the author's parallel freedom to modify, or even invent, the "otherness" to which the latter claims fidelity.

The manner in which Alencar's "Carta" describes this translational

project is also problematic. Alencar refers to the Tupi language in contradictory terms. On the one hand, he writes of Tupi as a "língua bárbara" (89), "barbarian language," and he describes the ideas of the Amerindians as "rudes e grosseiras" (89),"coarse and unrefined"; finally, he refers to the Tupi language as characterized by "certa rudez ingênua de pensamento e expressão" (89), "a certain naive coarseness in thought and expression". On the other hand, he describes Tupi, as mentioned above, as the "fonte que deve beber o poeta brasileiro; é dela que há de sair o verdadeiro poema nacional" (89),"the source from which the Brazilian poet must drink; from which the true national poem will spring." The "civilized language must mold itself to the primitive simplicity of the barbarian tongue"; although Indian ideas are "rude and gross," they "must be translated." Alencar proposes at the same time the superiority of the source language (Tupi) as an origin, while condemning it as "coarse and unrefined," and implicitly placing Portuguese in a position of superiority as a "civilized language."

Alencar tries to solve these contradictions in the comparison of the Tupi language, and its images, to flowers that have to be cultivated: "Se a investigação laboriosa das belezas nativas, feita sobre imperfeitos e espúrios diccionários, exauria o espírito; a satisfação de cultivar essas flores agrestes da poesia brasileira, deleitava" (89)—"If the laborious investigation of native beauties, made by means of imperfect and spurious dictionaries, tired the spirit; the satisfaction of cultivating those wild flowers of Brazilian poetry, was delightful.". This image of the foreign language as a depository of flowers brings to mind one of Herder's reflections about translation: "But I walk through foreign gardens to pick flowers for my language, as the betrothed of my manner

of thinking" (qtd. in Berman 38). Herder, in this reflection, seems to be at the opposite pole from which I have placed Alencar in the earlier part of this essay. Rather than the target language submitting to the influence of the source language, we now have the target language dominating the source language, the latter becoming a storehouse of linguistic elements for the former. Translation becomes a kind of collection. As Dante Gabriel Rossetti writes, "The only true motive for putting poetry into a fresh language must be to endow a fresh nation, as far as possible, with one more possession of beauty" (65). Alencar's image of translation as floriculture is not far from Herder's and Rossetti's vision of translation, except that it shows even less respect for the source language and text, since it emphasizes the translator's importance. She or he modifies the nature of the "source" text; he or she takes "wild" flowers and cultivates them. In fact, the quotation from Alencar could be read as privileging the act of cultivation, of changing a "natural" process to an artificial one like floriculture or agriculture, of changing a natural wilderness into a garden.

From the above, it is clear that Alencar presents his translational project in diametrically opposed terms. He emphasizes the importance of Tupi as an origin by proposing and, at least partially, achieving in his own text that the target language "mold itself as much as possible to the primitive innocence of the barbarian language." But he also foregrounds the primitivism of the same language that is being proposed as an origin. Therefore, the just praise of Alencar's "translational" achievements has often been done through an erasure of his own contradictory aims, images, and proposals.

Nevertheless, it is precisely in the contradictions that characterize

Alencar's relation to the Tupi language that *Iracema* reveals itself as a true "translational project."

Translations are problematic because they have to meet impossible requirements. They must be faithful to the original text and its source language, and, at the same time, be faithful to the target language. Alencar's hesitation between favoring the source language (Tupi) and devaluing it, (which implies valuing Portuguese over it), is only an extreme case of the quandary that characterizes translation: a double fidelity that is impossible. Derrida writes about "la tâche nécessaire et impossible de la traduction, sa nécessité *comme* impossibilité" (215; emphasis in the original).[9] Translation is a task that is both necessary and impossible; nevertheless, it is one constantly being fulfilled.

Alencar's contradictions also parallel another related topic in translation theory: that of translation as questioning, and even subverting, hierarchical relations of origin and supplement. As Derrida has pointed out, a translation is "un moment de sa [the original's] propre croissance" (232);[10] but at the same time, "si l'original appelle un complément, c'est qu'à l'origine il n'était pas là sans faute, plein complet, total identifique à soi" (232).[11]

If Alencar is unable to decide on the primacy of Portuguese or Tupi, alternating in his "Carta" between favoring one or the other, translation theory oscillates between favoring the source or the target language.

One must remember that if at one level *Iracema* possesses translational aspects and can be studied as a translation, it is an autonomous text, and that to talk about translation when dealing with it is, to a large extent, a figure of speech rather than an accurate description. After all, *Iracema*, in spite of its opening to the Tupi language, is not the translation of an earlier Tupi text, but rather an "original" text written by

Alencar in Portuguese.

Nevertheless, as I pointed out earlier in this essay, the ambiguities present in the theory and practice of translation are also manifested at the level of the story told in Alencar's novel. As Doris Sommer points out, *Iracema* "resumes the pattern of chronicles that record endless meetings between white conquerors and easy Indian conquests" (143). But what is interesting about the novel is precisely the way in which Alencar complicates this archetypical story. The relationship between Iracema and Martim differs from other "endless meetings" chronicled. Although the Indian woman is generally described as an "easy conquest," she is still expected to play a passive and submissive role. Iracema, on the contrary, is clearly the active partner, while Martim is characterized by his passivity. From their first meeting, in which Iracema shoots an arrow at Martim, through their first sexual encounter, in which she takes advantage of Martim's hallucination induced by the use of jurema, a psychomimetic plant, Iracema initiates and controls sexual contacts. As Campos writes, "Iracema's 'savage condition' freed Alencar from his conservative inhibitions and from the prejudices of his epoch, allowing him to create a female figure capable of amorous initiatives and sexual realization. . . ." (17 footnote 6). This inversion of the expected roles and behaviors of male and female characters is linked to a subversion of the expected hierarchical relation between the Portuguese and the Indians. Since Iracema is Indian and Martim Portuguese, any modification of the traditional relationship between male and female can be read as a subversion of the parallel hierarchy between European and Amerindian. Moreover, this subversion is thematized, in an even more explicit manner, in the passage where Martim decides to become Tupi, which is presented as a change of

allegiance from Portugal to Indigenous Brazil: "O guerreiro branco não quer mais outra pátria, senão a pátria de seu filho e de seu coração" (66)—"The white warrior no longer desires any other country save the land of his son and of his heart" (73).

In order to become Tupi, Martim undergoes a ceremony where Poti and Iracema not only paint, but, to use the narrator's word, "write" on Martim's body: "Depois variaram os cores, e muitos guerreiros costumaram escrever os emblemas de sus feitos" (67)—"They also varied the colors, and many warriors used to write the emblems of their deeds."[12] Iracema plays a characteristically active role during the ceremony: "Iracema tomou a rama da pena e pintou uma abelha sobre folha de árvore" (67)—"Iraçéma then took the feather-vane, and painted a leaf with a bee upon it" (75). The ceremony concludes with Iracema giving Martin a Tupi name: Cotiabo—the one that has been painted on.

The novel here has practically reversed the "pattern" Sommer writes about: the conqueror has been conquered, the seducer seduced. Rather than Portuguese culture, language and religion being imposed on the Indians, it is Tupi culture, language and religion that is imposed on the Portuguese. Martim even changes his name. Furthermore, the initiation ceremony is characterized by Martim's complete passivity, while Iracema and Poti act (write) on his body. The latter act reinforces the reversal of gender and cultural stereotypes present in the novel, especially when one remembers, as René Jara and Nicholas Spadaccini point out, that "inscription and penetration go hand in hand" (17).

It is precisely after this passage that the narrative takes a turn: Martim sees a ship in the distance, and "a saudade da pátria apertou-lhe no seio" (69)—"the Saudade of his country wrung his breast" (76). It is interesting that the reaffirmation of Martim's Portuguese identity

is linked to the use of the word "saudade," which is frequently considered to be untranslatable because of its complex nuances. It is claimed that this word describes a a feeling not only characteristic of Portuguese and Brazilian cultures but exclusive to them, although it belongs to the same semantic field as the English word nostalgia. The uniqueness of the word "saudade" is evidenced in the maintenance of the Portuguese word in the English translation.[13] In the novel, this reminder of Martim's Portuguese identity is related to his retaking the active role in his relationship with Iracema, who is relegated to a passive and submissive position.

At the end of the novel, when Martim returns, his brief Tupi identity as Cotiabo is completely forgotten. He establishes a Portuguese settlement, and brings with him a Catholic Priest. This ending is nothing less than an inverted version of the "writing" ceremony. If, in the first ceremony, Martim changes his name and becomes Tupi, the ending shows Poti, Martim's Pitiguara friend, converting and changing his name: "Poti foi o primeiro que ajoelhou aos pés do sagrado lenho" (87)—"Poty was the first who knelt at the foot of the Sacred Wood" (100). Later in the same page: "Ele recebou com o batismo o nome do santo, cujo era o dia; e o do rei, a quem ia servir, e sobre os dous o seu, na lingua dos novos irmãos" (87)—He received in baptism the name of the Saint whose day it was, and of the King he was about to serve; besides these two, his own translated into the tongue of his new brethren" (100). Poti's "conversion"—which is religious, political, and cultural—acts as a counterbalance to the ceremony where Martim temporarily became Tupi. Poti goes from being a chief of the Pitiguaras and Martim's "brother," as he constantly describes himself, to submitting to the Portuguese king and the Catholic religion. Moreover the

process by which Poti becomes Portuguese includes the replacement of his original Tupi name with a new Portuguese one. And this new name includes a translation of his Tupi name, Poti, into the European language.[14]

In this manner, the ending completes the restoration of the conventional hierarchical relation between the male/Portuguese and female/Indian that earlier passages had put into question. The novel concludes with the reestablishment of the superiority of the male and Portuguese poles over the female and Amerindian. Nevertheless, the novel is unusual in its hesitation between which pole of the binary opposition to favor.

This inability to fully privilege the Tupi or the Portuguese parallels the contradictions of *Iracema*'s translational project. Just as Alencar the translator hesitates and contradicts himself about the hierarchical positions of the Portuguese and Tupi languages, the narrative hesitates between privileging Iracema/the Tupi/female or Martim/the Portuguese/male. The end result is a novel where each of these characters is dominant and active during part of the narrative. Only at the end are Portuguese colonialism, patriarchy, and language, fully established, but at the price of nostalgia and sadness. Although the outcome—establishment of patriarchy and Portuguese superiority—is not fully subverted, an element of doubt is present in the narrative's ending. Alencar writes about Martim near the end of the novel: "Era sempre com emoção que o esposo de Iracema revia as plagas onde fora tão feliz, e as verdes folhas a cuja sombra dormia a formosa tabajara" (87)—"The husband of Iraçéma never could behold without the deepest emotion the shores where he had been so happy, and the green leaves under whose shade slept the beautiful Tabajára girl" (101). It is noteworthy

that the identity of Martim is described, at the end of the novel, as being based on his relationship with Iracema, the Amerindian woman. Moreover, the conqueror's emotions are not meaningless. After all, "a agra saudade" (87)—" the bitter Saudade" (101)—implies a lack that subverts any claim to hegemonic completion.

Derrida compares a translation to a marriage contract that contains the "promesse de produire un enfant dont la semence donnera lieu à histoire et croissance" (234).[15] If we temporarily read *Iracema* as exemplifying Derrida's phrase, Iracema can be interpreted as representing the source language (Tupi), Martim the target language (Portuguese), with Moacir then being the hybrid result of the influence of the former on the latter: Brazilian Portuguese. Even the phrase, "will give rise to history and growth," coincides with Alencar's belief in the capacity of a Tupi influenced Brazilian Portuguese (which is a language produced by a translational process) to produce "o verdadeiro poema nacional" (89)—"the true national poem."

This does not mean that *Iracema* is an allegory of translation. As David Haberly points out, *Iracema* is a "highly symbolic etiology of the creation... of Brazil" (47); and a Brazilian national "creation myth" (48). *Iracema* is a creation myth that is built on the contact between two cultures: the Indian and the Portuguese. It is the myth of "mestiçagem"—a physical, cultural, and spiritual miscegenation,[16] which like translation gives "rise to history and growth," not only in a linguistic or literary sense, but also in a cultural and national one.

Moreover, translation, especially when literal and open to the source language, can be seen as (usually) the most positive version of contact between cultures. Rather than the imposition by force of one culture over the other, translation presents the apparent voluntary

submission of the target language to that of the other. And since translation can be seen as being part of intercultural relationships—as the Romantics proclaimed—it can be interpreted synechdochally as presenting an ethical model that contrasts with the brutal reality of imperialism and domination. Thus, the discourse of translation seems to naturally make the jump from text to language to culture; a jump that is implicit in *Iracema* where language becomes not only the Tupi tongue, but also the "vida selvagem dos autóctones brasileiros," "os modos de seu pensamento, as tendencias de seu espírito, e até as menores particularidades de sua vida" (89)—"the savage life of the autochthonous Brazilians," "their modes of thinking, the tendencies of their spirit, and even the smallest particularities of their life.".

A problem arises when one compares the "myth" created by Alencar with the "reality" of Portuguese conquest and colonization. *Iracema* presents a version of the history of Brazil where the relation between the Portuguese and the Amerindians is basically peaceful, and the subordination of the Amerindian is voluntary, as exemplified by Iracema and Poti. But even the most summary review of the nation's history shows Alencar's description to be false. For instance, John Hemming has calculated that from the time of the arrival of the Portuguese, 1500, to 1978 the Amerindian population decreased from 2,431,000 to 100,000 (492). Alencar presents a rewriting of a history of violence into a myth of the tragic love affair between Iracema and Martim. Interestingly, "myth" was considered the highest form of translation during the Romantic period (Berman 112). Novalis wrote: "The novel, as it were, is free history—the mythology of history, as it were" (qtd. in Berman 112). Yet precisely by writing a novel that is "the mythology of history"—and the "history" in question is the conquest of

the Indian population in Brazil by the Portuguese—Alencar is able to suppress the historical fact of the genocide of the Brazilian Amerindian. Thus, *Iracema* can be seen as translating a history of genocide into a myth of loss and death, but also of the promise of "mestiçagem." Precisely because it fuses "mestiçagem" and translation, *Iracema* is foundational both in a linguistic and a social sense.

If Alencar's translational foundation of a Tupi-influenced Brazilian language and literature is ultimately based on the subordination of the same Tupi language to Portuguese, the promise of "mestiçagem" is based on the suppression of the history of genocide and exploitation of the Brazilian Indian. Furthermore, Alencar's mythologizing of a history of brutality, its replacement by "conciliation and cordiality," responds to the needs and expectations of his Brazilian readers both in his time and ours (Sommer 153). The principal psychological and political need being that of establishing a sense of political and historical difference for the new Brazilian Republic with respect to Portugal (Sommer 140). Therefore, the homology between Alencar, as a "translational" writer, and as a creator of historic, social, and political myths is close to perfect. Alencar in both aspects of his work suppresses elements of the Tupi culture, language, and history, in deference to the Brazilian readers' expectations and needs. But by distorting these elements of Tupi culture, Alencar is able to incorporate them into a new conception of nationality and literature that became the basis for Brazilian national identity.

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Notes

1 "Uma experiência em prosa" (*Iracema* 90).

2 "...the Brazilian poet must translate into his language the ideas of the Indians, even though they are coarse and unrefined; . . . it is necessary that the civilized language mold itself as much as possible to the primitive innocence of the barbarian language; and not represent Indian images and thoughts except by phrases and expressions that seem to the reader natural in the mouths of "savages." I have translated all quotations from the "postscript" to the novel, the "Carta ao Dr. Jaguaribe" (88-91), because they are not included in Isabel Burton's English translation of the novel. All other quotations from *Iracema* are taken from her translation. I must also point out that I have used the Portuguese versions of the names of the characters throughout my essay.

3 Haroldo de Campos's "*Iracema*: A Vanguard Archaeography" is probably the most consistently laudatory reading of the novel.

4 See Cornejo Polar 88; Rama 122-23.

5 Two of the most important essays on translation are Walter Benjamin's "The Task of the Translator," and Jacques Derrida's "Des Tours de Babel." I will make use of the insights present in both essays.

6 "The reference of a pure signifier to a single being—and for this reason untranslatable" (166).

7 It is interesting to note the modifications in Burton's translation. She has changed the "c" in Iracema for ç, as well as adding an accent mark not present in the Portuguese. She has also made her translation even "stranger" than the Portuguese original. Her "White Warrior's son" is in the original a simple "teu" (your), and the word Abaty is originally an uncapitalized abati. Burton's addition of "White Warrior" is part of a tendency to use words and phrases associated with North American Indians. Another example can be found on page 96, where the original "cabana"—cabin, hut—becomes "wigwam."

8 In spite of her admiration for Alencar's "linguistic emancipation," Sommer is aware of the ambiguities in his writings. Nevertheless, the connection between the linguistic aspect of Alencar's work and the thematic and allegoric ambiguities found in his novels is not analyzed in her essay.

9 "The necessary and impossible task of translation, its necessity as impossibility" (171).

10 ". . . the translation will truly be a moment in the growth of the original" (188).

11 ". . . if the original calls for a complement, it is because at the origin it was not there without fault, full, complete, total, identical to itself" (188).

12 I have provided my own translation for this passage, because Burton eliminates the word and image of "writing" from her translation: "They also

varied the colours, and many warriors were covered with emblems of their deeds" (74).

[13] James L. Taylor, in his *A Portuguese-English Dictionary* translates "saudade" as: "longing, yearning (for someone); 'memory imbued with longing'; fond remembrance; nostalgia, homesickness" (571).

[14] The translation of Poti's name into Portuguese is significant because it permits the Brazilian reader to identify this Indian chief with an actual historical figure, Felipe Camarão. Camarão was an Amerindian leader who helped the Portuguese expel the rival Dutch Colonizers from Brazil. See Burns 52.

[15] "... with the promise to produce a child whose seed will give rise to history and growth" (191).

[16] "Miscegenation was the road to racial perdition in Europe, but it was the way of redemption in Latin America, a way of annihilating difference and constructing a deeply horizontal, fraternal dream of national identity" (Sommer 39).

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