

Ovid Trans-created: Pygmalion, Orpheus, and Myrrha at the Margins of Reception and Translation in Hilda Hilst's *Letters from a Seducer* (1991)

The work of Modernist Brazilian author Hilda Hilst (1930-2004) demonstrates a generous use of the classics. One encounters references to Homer, Catullus, Ovid, Martial, and others scattered through her writings which encompass prose, poetry, and drama. She engages with these authors polemically, as she turns them into characters, criticizes those who have read (or not read, or misread) them, and highlights the taboo and profane nature of their oeuvre. Her approach, therefore, make us consider the encounters with antiquity that are possible for a Latin American female author (Gorab Leme 2023). Moreover, her writing is often considered hermetic, and is populated by images of incomprehension and unfeasible communication (letters without answers, monologues addressing dead listeners). In her multiform novel *Cartas de um sedutor* (1991), both the afterlife of the classics and the impossibility of engaging with them merge, evoking a debate around the limits of reception and impossibilities of translation. In this talk, I utilize two concepts discussed by Haroldo de Campos (1929-2003), anthropophagy (2006a) and trans-creation (2006b; 2011), in order to analyze how the work explores and defies the boundaries of reception and translation. Anthropophagy, first defined by Oswald de Andrade (1928), became critical to the Brazilian Modernist revolution (1922), and it refers to the critical devouring of a universalizing cultural legacy that prompts deconstruction and revision of hierarchies, instead of submitting the local to whiteness. Trans-creation, one of its products (2006c; Prado 2009), is central to Campos' theory of literary translation. Trans-creation highlights the need to create something new that captures the qualities of an original work, since aesthetic language is by nature un-translatable. Interestingly, trans-creation elides the boundaries

between translation and reception as understood in the field of classics, as the trans-created work is at once new and a part of the tradition that created it (trans-creator as an author).

In *Cartas*, Ovid's misogynistic singer is recreated by the female author who composes taboo and pornographic literature, as Hilda makes Pygmalion devour Orpheus (the creation absorbing the creator), who reads love-letters about the sexual affair between a brother and a sister. We discover that the sister in fact desired their father, like Myrrha. The letters become too upsetting to the speaker's lover, his internal audience, and he turns to telling stories, all centered around transformations. Hilda's critical approach to Ovid can be untangled once her work is read through Campos' scholarship. By reconstructing the trajectory of Cordelia-Myrrha, the once desirous but now puritan unresponsive heroine, as well as the literary transformations that it prompts, one is pushed to read the work in anthropophagic key (Gumiero 2018). Moreover, Hilst's style – disreputable, but crafted (in theory, at least) to captivate a wide audience with a penchant for scandal – not only enacts barriers in communication, but also offers itself as untranslatable (Keene 2018). The framework of anthropophagy, therefore, makes one question whether Hilst receives the *Metamorphoses*, rewrites the male authors of the pornographic canon, or trans-creates Ovid in a way that suits her embodiment of the Classics.

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