

INTERVIEW WITH PROFESSOR TEREZA VIRGÍNIA RIBEIRO BARBOSA¹

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Interview conducted by the Google Meet platform, on July 4, 2022.⁴

Link: <https://youtu.be/NlOcXSCzHW8>

Gustavo Oliveira: Hello, my name is Gustavo Oliveira, I am a professor at the Pontifícia Universidade Católica de Campinas (PUC-Campinas) and, together with Camila Zanon, graduated from the Universidade de São Paulo (USP) and doctor by the same university, currently doing her post-doctoral studies at Universidade de Coimbra. Together we organize the dossier “Reception, Readings and Influences of Homer” to the Journal Herodoto, the journal of Classical World and its Afro-Asians connections of Universidade Federal de São Paulo (UNIFESP).

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Today, in the journal and in our dossier, we have the great pleasure of receiving the interviewee, Tereza Virgínia Ribeiro Barbosa, full professor of the Department of Letters of Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais (UFMG). She is graduated in Portuguese and Greek and has a master's degree in Linguistic Studies by UFMG, and is a doctor in Linguistics and Portuguese Language by Universidade Estadual de São Paulo (UNESP). The professor is member of the "Sociedade Brasileira de Estudos Clássicos" (SBEC), coordinator of the research group "Tradução de Teatro", and researcher of the "Núcleo de Estudos Antigos e Medievais" (NEAM), from Faculdade de Letras (FALE-UFMG). She has experience in the area of letters, with emphasis in Greek tragedy, working mostly on the following themes: ancient theater, translation, Greek epics, satirical drama, mythology, the study of laughter in Antiquity, classical and other literatures, tradition and renovation in the ancient theater and classical translation in the Brazilian literature. Among several works, the professor did, in co-authorship, a translation by images, a comic book, of Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, besides other publications during her extensive career.

Professor, be welcome! We would like to chat with you, mostly, about the Reception of Classics, specially Homer, an area that you have been working in with great distinction; and to begin with some reflections on how you conceive the field. How do you see the field of Classical Reception, and what motivated you to work in it during your academic career?

Tereza Virgínia Ribeiro Barbosa: Thank you for the invitation. I am gladly together with Gustavo and Camila to give my opinion on these subjects. Classical Reception, I discovered since I joined the university. I began at the university when I was 27 years old, so I spent my life in the university, I left, and I am still in the post-graduation. I am already 66 years old, which means an entire life. Since I joined, the Classical Reception was very important for me, and it had always been a marginalized field. Lately, it has been growing, and well seen in Brazil. In Europe and the US, it seems that it has reached its apex and, now, it is declining a bit; it seems that we are a bit late to catch foreigners' academic movements. However, the only way to keep the Classical Studies alive is through the Classical Reception. It has always been what motivated me to seek the Reception of Classics, it is like the life of the specific classical studies. Those who do not understand Greek, Latin, or the non-occidental ancient languages, will only notice the worth of these cultures if they get to know Classical Reception in the access

of all common people, who are not specialists. In other words, I think that Classical Reception is our future life.

I began with Classical Reception in a way that is very attractive to teenagers. I had a group of myth tellers; when I left the group, which lasted for nearly 20 years, I gave my direction role to a colleague. This colleague has a vision of African studies, he will make African mythology work in schools and, now, I have lost contact with this group. Then, at the moment that I left the group, I began with the comic books, which was delightful to do. When my grandson was born, I did *Iliad* and *Odyssey* for him. Not just for him, but also for other reasons. I loved to read comic books, I used to read them hidden. My older brother locked me in my room to study, and I put a comic inside the book. And I stayed there, studying in bed, reading books with the comic inside.

I really like to see, and our culture is very visual. I consider the comics, not only in Classical Reception, but also in translation. In this sense, I promoted this reception/translation in the way that Spivak⁵ speaks. She is an Indian theoretician of Comparative Literature Theory, who says that the best way to do comparative literature is translating. Because, by translating, you will notice the strategy of the poet, the strategy of the author, and thus I began to understand that Homer was cinema, was *métopa*, and I thought about the comic books in this way. Then, shortly, Classical Reception is a way to keep the Classics alive.

Gustavo Oliveira: Do you consider that the specialists in Classical Studies, mostly here in Brazil, could play a bigger role in these dialogues with a greater audience, beyond universities, beyond academic books and articles, using other medias to manage and share contents about Antiquity?

Tereza Virgínia Ribeiro Barbosa: Classics Reception, when it goes to the hands of a non-specialist, becomes too loose, too superficial; It scrimps itself to the plot, to myths and plots. It is not that myths and plots are less valuable, but what I think lasts is the technique of doing poetry, of doing the narration. Why does it last? Because we need the technique to teach how to do new texts. Because we need the technique to show the value of the writer, we need it to prevent the receptor from being fully seduced, do you understand?

⁵ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Indian theoretician of Comparative Literature Theory. *Heródoto*, Unifesp, Guarulhos, v.7, n.1 - 2022.1. p. 11-19.
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So I think that, in this way, the Classics Reception gains if it is made by an expert, who knows it well. Of course, not with the academic terminology and way of action, the expert needs to be aware of the role that he is playing. But, as much as he knows how to deal with this literature which he retakes (and I avoid the word “adapt”), to do it in another way, whether translating, rewriting, or creating from that material, I think it has more qualities. Thus, we are not seeking educational enablers, nor diffusion enablers, we are looking to share the techniques, the thought, the classical structure of text creating.

Camila Zanon: It is very interesting that you comment on adaptation, because it is a very current terminology. Moreover, I want to use this terminology to ask my question, that is related to these versions and transpositions of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* to comic books that you organized and published. They are very pleasant to both readers, those who know and those who don’t know the original work. And I have, and I believe that the readers also have this curiosity, of how this process was. Which were your greatest challenges in this transposition process, of those huge poems, to comics, and the difficulties with the language and the creation of images? Which was your target audience? Did you really think of your grandson or in a broader audience?

Tereza Virgínia Ribeiro Barbosa: I tend to create terminologies to what I do. For example, I don’t translate theaters, but I am a director of translation of theater plays, because I do the translation with many students. I frame that translation and whittle it down, enhance, modify. Then, it works like a director that shapes an actor to the way he wants him. Furthermore, I don’t like to call the comics we do, me and Piero Bagnariol, adaptation, but translation, it is taking a word and translating it into an image. We tried to theorize about it, and in this theory we took texts like Machado de Assis and Dante.

Piero is the cartoonist that makes the comics with me. He also did an adaptation, a translation. He doesn’t call it a translation, because he is not from the field of Letters, but he talks about a “quadrinização” (a “comicization”) of Dante. So, I rather call it translation into comics, Homer translated to comics, or tragedies with translation to comics, in the way to catch the images.

And how did it all start? I had a scholarship by FAPEMIG to study with figures of speech and I thought that language needs a figure. How do I put a figure in the language? Which figures are these? How to draw metonymy? So, when we meet, for example: “Achilles: swift feet”, I don’t know the whole Achilles, how is his head? I know a metonymy of Achilles, so we present Achilles by his feet, before his face, in the comics. Truthfully, those are not difficulties, but pleasant challenges, in the sense we think of the word “challenge”, but are also theoretical inventions we do.

At the time that I worked on this research, I worked with a group of students, and I think the biggest challenge I had, which was the most pleasant, was working with people, to get to a common theoretical ground. In the same way that in theater translation, the greatest challenge is working with people, to face conflicts, to solve problems and to create a harmonic environment, so that from this harmonic environment rises a beautiful and good product, *kalos kai agathos*. May this product have no fissures, no harmony break. This is the biggest problem.

My life goal is to work with the collective. It may seem paradoxical that a professor, that works with research from the beginning, being the research a lonely work inside the reading room, thinks that this work needs to go from solitude to the collective, otherwise, it loses its meaning. Thus, it starts the diffusion, the multiplication, the teaching and all this scattering. The greater difficulty, then, is to work with people in harmony, with pleasure, with a common ground. I like to create names for new things, I like to work with the collective, and maybe that is why I call my comics *a translation into comics*, it’s a name I like to use.

Camila Zanon: How was it to work with the cartoonist, this artist? Or if it was many artists, this team already knew the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*? Was there a process of collective immersion? What came first, the selection of pieces or the construction of the images? How was the work with the artist? Had he created something first?

Tereza Virgínia Ribeiro Barbosa: It began with a research group with FAPEMIG. Since there was a deadline to conclude the project, it began with a small publishing house from Belo Horizonte, with many restrictions in the process. So, there were many clashes between the publishing team and my team, because I called students specialized in comics that wanted to force me to shape my work according to the comic theory. According to

the comic theory, sometimes the image is more important than the language, thus my work doesn't conform to this. The image is the language. I believe that both literature and image are one, with the same value, and it was the reason for many clashes with the comic theory.

They call it sequential art; there were many names, comics and novels, graphic novels, but I did not abdicate the name "literature". Literature that contains figures of speech. It was a big problem and all my students, good ones in sequential art, rather call it that, they did not accept my revolutionary ideas from not knowing what should be done.

This cartoonist, Piero, who is a self-taught European artist, with his own methods, did not want to reproduce the American methods. This way, the "comiczation" of the *Iliad*, of the *Odyssey* and of *Orestes*, which was published last year, is all new. They are new in the sense that we are creating an Italian-Brazilian thing, a way of doing an Italian-Brazilian comic. The relationship with this cartoonist was almost that Platonic soulmate of creation, it was extraordinaire. We did the *Odyssey* in less than a year, pulling all-nighters, all by e-mail, without in-person meetings.

To make *Iliad*, there were in-person meetings of a group of four. I had a student of Greek literature that did not want to let go of certain academic questions about Greek literature, and in art you have to sacrifice some things. I thought that the most exhausting parts were the most productive to a comic book, and this led to clashes. Besides this, the publishing house wanted to conform me for the market, it was very difficult. I did not want to make comics for silly children. I did it for my grandson when he was five to six years old, and I did not hide anything that Homer did, because I believe that children perceive everything that is loose in the world.

The *Iliad* is violent. If you don't teach children about violence, to help them understand, you are refusing to raise that child. The target audience, then, was my grandson, but not treating this grandson as a kindergartener that needed the pretty face of heroes, pretty hairs and landscapes. We searched the landscapes of the Greek vases of the Mycenaean period. In the *Odyssey*, we used the Minoan period. In *Iliad*, we used the Mycenaean period and reproduced those images and gave it life. In *Odyssey*, for example, the images of Nausicaa, who in the translation has Rastafarian hair: "Nausicaa, of the Rastafarian hair", to think about other ways to represent it that were not curly hair or well-braided hair, that relate to the golden translation that we do of Homer. Homer all standardized, all fitted in a grammatical Portuguese template, let's say, and thinking that Homer as oral, oral

literature. I don't know if he spoke the correct grammar that is in Ragon⁶ or in Cunliffe⁷.

These translations are difficult to understand. To savor it, as said by Aristoteles, you need to know it before to recognize it in the text. However, the drawings are very pretty and the kids spend hours admiring them. So we have in Homer's *Iliad*, a section like "where is Wally?", and we made one like "where is Achilles?", with all that confusion in the battlefield for the child to search for Achilles. I consider this a classical upbringing, with all my soul. The kid does not need to understand and, in this sense, that is the difficulty of my comics, he does not need to read and discard it. He has to read it once, notice a little, re-read it, notice some more, and come back to it, like we do with the classics. You can never understand a classic in a first reading, you have to read and re-read. We have the goal to make a classical adaptation, so we say, and we will see how far it can go.

Then, there is also *Orestes*, the book is all in black and white, so no-one can say that we are manipulating the passion that the classical tragedy brings. The artist draws very well the adaptation of Agamemnon's toothless mask, from whom Orestes is a descendant. The play with "descendente sem dente" (toothless descendant), who is the crazy boy Orestes. This way, they can even color *Orestes*.

The question is the publishing market. These works, these volumes have a great quality in paper, in image, with a quality of finishing touches that the comic books in the market do not have. This is a complication and a good thing. The hardcover copy of *Iliad* is a collector's item, I have only one copy. But there was a series of impositions, like page numbers, the kind of thing that the publishing houses demand. But the Editora Paulista gives us the quantity of pages we want, the subject we want, the colors we want, the paper we want. It's a rarity in Brazil, with all the restrictions, to find a place that publishes and distributes comics like we want. My desire is to do comics for the rest of my life.

Gustavo Oliveira: I am anxious to have a copy of *Orestes*. But, going to translations into comics of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, you spoke about these imagery references of the ancient Greek world, in *Odyssey* much related to

⁶AGON, Éloi. *Grammaire grecque*. Paris: De Gigord, 1957, 5^a ed.

⁷ CUNLIFFE, Richard J. *A lexicon of the Homeric dialect*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963. Available at: <http://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu/cunliffe>.

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Minoan art. Was the choice of these references a joint decision with the cartoonist, or was it your suggestion?

Tereza Virgínia Ribeiro Barbosa: I don't have the American technique, nor the French one, nor any other techniques to do the script. I go from the literary text, and the literary text in Greek, which are Homer and the Tragedies. I read what is written and I search for images, ancient and contemporary, of those actions that are drawn, with sounds and letters; and I make a collage of images for the cartoonist. I mean, it is totally a script. He is doing it with *Orestes'* script, that we are trying to get into the National Plan for School Books (Plano Nacional do Livro Didático - PNLD), teaching how to make this type of script to those who are not specialized in comicization, at primary and secondary school. So, how would the Fury of Achilles be? The moment when Achilles wants to murder Agamemnon, when Agamemnon took Briseis away because of Chryseis; what kind of movement would both Achilles and Agamemnon have? And we made this collage of images, images with images, always thinking about Warburg⁸'s Mnemosyne Atlas, like The Thinker. These are images, icons, of sadness. The *Pietà*, thinking on the *Pietà* with *Orestes*. We see Zeus, we imagine the *Pietà* and we put Zeus and Sarpedon. We think about Patroclus' pyre with that vase that has a pyre. So, we do the history of the image until our days, from the propaganda to the Cretan frescoes, for example.

We started to make the *Argonauts*, but now it is suspended, because I have no time at the moment; I am doing research about Byzantine mosaics. So, it is that kind of research. As the cartoonist knows well the region where, we suppose, the Homeric poems took place, it is too easy because the images fit. We avoid working with language, besides the original Greek, and he always searches for translations in Italian to be able to read the text. So, we read deeply the text many times; the same snippet many times, a scene that we want to reproduce. For example, we can choose in that scene to emphasize the simile, we can choose in that scene to emphasize the alliterations that is into the scene like that first Batman TV show, where the onomatopoeia shows up. We select in each scene what is prettier, what is more relevant, aesthetically speaking, to be able to reproduce in comics.

⁸ WARBURG, Aby. *Gesammelte Schriften II-I*. Der Bilderatlas Mnemosyne, editado por Martin Warnke e Claudia Brink. Berlim, Akademie Verlag, 2000, 2^a ed.

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Camila Zanon: Professor, speaking of images and similes, we can notice a concern, in the comics, with the similes. Was it a choice on purpose? Are those more easily comicized?

Tereza Virgínia Ribeiro Barbosa: It was and wasn't, because we searched those figures of speech in the *Iliad* and we found them in the formulas. We do the dawn, in *Iliad*, different each time, but it is the same formula. The *Odyssey*, on another hand, does not have many similes understood like the *Iliad*, there is another diction, another style, it is very curious. The formulas in the *Odyssey* are formulas, but in a different way, thus we had to use other resources. For example, we had to tell Telemachus' history with Orestes' in a comic page divided in half. So, Telemachus' history is in a way, Ulysses' history is on the top, and the allusion to Orestes as the one who vindicated his father in an exemplary way, and Telemachus as the one who would have to do the same in the *Odyssey*, so that Penelope couldn't do the same thing Clytemnestra did with Orestes.

There is the episode of cheating between Ares and Aphrodite. Ulysses, hearing the aoidos' telling from the Phaeacians' land and the irony of the thing: he thinks it's cool, and laughs of the Aphrodite's cheating on Hephaestus not knowing if his wife was cheating and if she would end it upon his arrival. Then, I understand that the comic is teaching literature, is teaching Greek culture and is translating Homer this way, so I think I have no interest in telling all the plot, that is why I always give spoilers of what I do. It is not the plot that interests me, it is how the story will be told, which is the Greek technique.

Gustavo Oliveira: Professor, thank you so much for this interview, and this delightful chat about such important themes, these works made from the translation and comicization of the Homeric poems. For those listening or watching us or reading this interview, we invite you all to explore the other numbers of the Journal *Heródoto*, and the other articles of this dossier, which will deal with the reception of Homer and his influence through time.

Tereza Virgínia Ribeiro Barbosa: Thanks!