

The Greek Theater Festival in the History Course at the University of Pernambuco – Mata Norte Campus: Recollection of a Living Time

By José Maria Souza Neto*

Recount of the Greek Theater Festival Project, which has been held since 2006 in the History Course at the University of Pernambuco – Mata Norte Campus: legal and institutional justification; plays presented; theoretical and methodological foundation; ethical principles and case analysis.

Between late September and early October 2022, students from the third semester of the Bachelor's Degree in History at the University of Pernambuco – Mata Norte Campus participated in the Greek Theater Festival as part of the evaluation for the mandatory course "Education and Historical Culture". Divided into three groups, organizing themselves primarily independently (with the help of a student assistant and the supervision of the professor), they performed three plays by Euripides: *Medea*, *Helen*, and *The Trojan Women*. In doing so, they took part in an experience that has been ongoing for 19 consecutive years, since 2006, when the first of these festivals was held. Even during the Covid 19 pandemic, a way was found to keep this practice alive: with each student at home, reciting the verses of comedies and tragedies, two classes (2020 and 2021) managed to present their plays via Google Meet. This text aims to recount this history, present the theoretical and methodological foundations of this experience, and explore the relevance of Greek theater for the training of future history teachers at the University of Pernambuco.

We seek to present an experience report concerning history teachers' training. Working in a disadvantaged region, we employ active pedagogy methods, placing students at the center of the learning process. They receive selected plays from classical Greek theater, adapt them while receiving classroom instruction on the specific historical period and finally present the play. The performance aims to bring these students closer to ancient literature and demonstrate, in a practical and objective way, how this tool can be used in history classes. This experience is part of the debates that have emerged since the 2000s in Brazil about the relevance of teaching Ancient History in the country, the renewal of this knowledge and how to approach it in a post-colonial context.

The Mata Norte Campus is located about 60 km from Recife, the capital of the Brazilian state of Pernambuco, in the municipality of Nazaré da Mata¹,

*Professor, State University of Pernambuco, Brasil.

1. Available at http://sit.mda.gov.br/download/caderno/caderno_territorial_153_Mata%20Norte%20-%20PE.pdf Accessed on: 08/01/2022.

situated in the Mata Norte Region. According to the 2010 Census, most municipalities in this region have a Human Development Index (HDI) between 0.600 and 0.699, considered medium and below the state average. Economically, the region is predominantly rural, with the sugarcane and ethanol sectors being particularly prominent, as sugarcane plantations occupy nearly half of the region's total area. This profile, however, has been changing in recent years, mainly due to the installation of factories in neighboring municipalities².

Despite its economic fragility, that region is one of the most important cultural hubs in Pernambuco: sugar mills produce fine *cachaça* (distilled spirit) and rapadura (whole brown sugar blocks), there are beautiful beaches. Its intangible wealth is reflected in the various forms: the municipality of Tracunhaém is home to a vigorous center of clay crafts with a style that cannot be found anywhere else; music and dance, that come from Indigenous and African origins, are performed by the population, specially the *maracatus* (a musical rhythm, dance and ritual of religious syncretism locally originated) (Fundarpe 2009: 7). In other words, is not a space without its own cultural references, where some new knowledge is merely introduced regardless of local traditions.

The guiding framework for structuring the Greek Theater Festival program has been, from the outset, the Political-Pedagogical Plan of the History Course. Based on principles stemming from the reforms in teacher education following the LDB 9.394/96, the Law of Guidelines and Bases for National Education, and incorporating discussions proposed by the National Common Curricular Base (BNCC), it advocates for the "integration of Teaching, Research, and Extension" with an emphasis on the "conditions of initial teacher education," explicitly manifested in the "conceptions of curriculum, learning development, methodology, and assessment," in the "theoretical foundation of each subject, supported by recent discussions of existing conceptions, in line with the socio-interactionist approach, with the primary objective of ensuring the updating and contextualization of knowledge," and in the importance given to "educators and students in the process of collective work towards the construction of a new social practice".

When designing the curricular units (and their subsequent updates), the Political-Pedagogical Plan of the course aimed at fostering the "interrelation with the social context and the national common base, respecting the specificity and peculiarity that must be considered in each location, according to the needs and existing programs." It also emphasized the "political-social dimension of didactics, understanding that teaching practice does not occur in a vacuum;

2. "(...) The municipality of Goiana, which now hosts the Pharmaceutical and Chemical Hub, with its main enterprise being the Brazilian Company of Hemoderivatives and Biotechnology (HEMOBRAS), a glass factory led by Vivix Vidros Planos, and an Automotive Hub, with Fiat Chrysler Automobiles (FCA). The surrounding municipalities have also seen new industrial ventures, including the Heineken factory in Igarassu, and the factories of AMBEV and Grupo Petrópolis, forming a hub in the Food and Beverage sector." In CAVALCANTI, 2022.

rather, it develops within a concrete social environment, integrated into an educational policy that involves students from specific social strata." This multidimensional educational action involves the convergence of several strands: humanistic, political-social, scientific, and technical.

Since its conception, the central focus of this project has been providing students direct access to Greek sources translated into Portuguese. The pedagogical approach to the Ancient World, previously applied in the History Program at the Mata Norte Campus, centered on reading textbooks (many of which were designed for high school students) and learning through repetition. Such practices reflected a broader reality: since the officialization of History teaching in Brazil, Antiquity had been identified as an activity of mechanical memorization, both by students and teachers. Learning it meant knowing names, events, and dates by heart, merely repeating what was written in the book or copied into notebooks (Bittencourt 2008: 67). The proposal of the Greek Theatre Festival was explicitly opposed to this state of affairs³ focusing instead on the development of what the BNCC would later call a "historical attitude" meaning the ability to critically interpret the past rather than merely memorize it, that is:

(...) a set of competencies to be acquired through the teaching of history that enable a more systematic, well-grounded, and critical reading of history. The development of these competencies, in turn, stems from the experiences of both students and teachers. This experience is directly linked to the "social reality and the universe of the school community, as well as its historical, social, and cultural references" (BNCC: 351). In other words, the construction of knowledge is directly related to the sociocultural reality of the individual (Silva, Morais 2017: 116).

Instead of memorizing a certain (and inherently limited) amount of information, the students have access to a historical source that will be read, adapted, and performed before the class during the festival days. Throughout the course, it is the teacher's role to work with them on the historical context of these works' production, the intended audience, how they were received at the time of their performance, and how more recent periods have appropriated them. This

3. And in this sense, it has always placed itself in the field of innovation, understanding the latter as "introducing something that has been previously invented, discovered, or created into a certain environment. Its role consists of integrating, assimilating, and adapting new ideas imported from other places (...) a process of translation, of decoding pure novelty into something acceptable, applicable, with the aim of improving what already exists, of introducing an enhancement, better knowledge, better practice, and a better way of being. (...) it carries within the notion of a strategy for action and is governed by practical objectives. Innovative action is in the realm of application, understood not as the result of a determined action, but as a process. It implies an intention for change within a project fostered by the actors involved, an intention expressed in an anticipatory vision in the form of defined objectives, or an intention that manifests as a reaction of protest against a given situation MITRULIS, 2002, p. 231.

approach allows the works to make sense not only for the period being studied but also for the students' lived experiences, thus establishing a dialogue between the past and the present⁴.

So that, as established in the Political-Pedagogical Plan, teaching practice develops in a concrete social environment, integrated into an educational policy that involves students from diverse social backgrounds, it is essential that these students understand the topics taught in class (in our specific case, Athenian classical theater) in relation to their own life experiences. Snell (2005: 97) quotes Aristotle when he says, "the historian narrates what has happened, the poet what could happen." This is a perspective that is always explored in the classroom. Myth, but also theater, are powerful social experiments (Buxton 2019) that lead human experiences to realms where traveling in person would be difficult – if not fatal. During the performance, both the audience and the cast are exposed to a simple question: "what if?" What if such a tragedy happened to me, how would I react? What if I found myself in a similar dilemma, what would I do? What if my community acted this way, would I follow or stand against it? The questions multiply because theater imposes them, forcing us to confront ourselves, as "literature and the other arts stem from the human impulse to understand, represent, and thus control the meaning of life" (Luna 2012: 29).

Students are required to reflect on the preparation process for the festival (reading the play, adapting it, rehearsing, creating costumes, etc.) from the perspective of the competencies and skills proposed by the BNCC. Among the general competencies, we highlight the following: "Valuing and enjoying diverse artistic and cultural expressions, from local to global, and also participating in varied practices of artistic-cultural production"; "Using different languages – verbal (oral or visual-motor, such as Brazilian sign language, and written), bodily, visual, auditory, and digital – as well as artistic language knowledge (...) to express and share information, experiences, ideas, and feelings in different contexts and produce meanings that lead to mutual understanding"; and "Exercising empathy, dialogue, conflict resolution, and cooperation, fostering respect and promoting respect for others and human rights, with openness and appreciation for the diversity of individuals and social groups, their knowledge, identities, cultures, and potentia" (Pernambuco 2019: 24-25).

Among the specific competencies for History class, we emphasize the understanding of "historical events, power relations, and processes and mechanisms of transformation and maintenance of social, political, economic, and cultural structures over time and in different spaces to analyze, take a stance, and intervene

4. The historian's attitude is related to the process of reading the world. This term has already become a cliché in quotes from the master Paulo Freire - 'The reading of the world precedes the reading of the word' - yet it remains a necessary reference in educational processes. A history teacher or any other discipline's teacher who intends to work from this perspective must understand how learning processes take place "SILVA, MORAIS, 2017, p. 118.

in the contemporary world." It is not enough to simply perform the play; students must also understand the context in which it was created. This is equally relevant for the "questions, hypotheses, arguments, and propositions regarding documents, interpretations, and specific historical contexts, utilizing different languages and media" (Pernambuco 2019: 521-522). We stress to students that they are working with a historical document, open to analysis, moving away from seeing Antiquity as a merely mnemonic period and toward a problem-oriented history, "constructed around hypotheses and in-depth analysis, rather than a History that is merely factual or descriptive" (Barros 2009: 30).

Being an essentially practical proposal, it is fundamental that the Greek Theater Festival is also grounded in the skills proposed by the BNCC (2019: 536-538). Thus, we present the content for the sixth year of Elementary Education, discussing the three thematic units in which the proposal is framed ("The invention of the classical world and its contrast with other societies," "Logics of political organization," and "Work and forms of social and cultural organization") and identifying the knowledge objects involved. These include, for example, "Discussing the concept of Classical Antiquity, its reach and limitations within the Western tradition, as well as its impacts on other societies and cultures," "Explaining the formation of Ancient Greece, with an emphasis on the formation of the polis and the political, social, and cultural transformations of the period, highlighting the emergence of philosophy as a form of knowledge and the notions of democracy, citizenship, and politics, pointing out their changes and continuities over time and the various forms of appropriation by other societies and civilizations," or "Describing and analyzing the different social roles of women in the ancient world and medieval societies and the changes and continuities in the customs, habits, values, and ways of living, coexisting, and working characteristic of different groups of women in a given locality, discussing the forms of sexual, social, cultural, religious, and gender discrimination exercised against women throughout those periods").

All these skills are presented and discussed with the students, and each play chosen is selected with these elements in mind. For example, in a comedy like Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*⁵ we highlight both the (skill) formation of the Athenian polis and the (competence) female participation within this political structure. In *The Persians* by Aeschylus, we emphasize the relations between Classical Antiquity and neighboring cultures (skill), criticizing the perspective of inherent superiority in the classical world and placing it within a broader Mediterranean context, marked by dialogue and ethno-cultural exchanges (competence).

The chosen plays come from the classical repertoire of Athenian theater (between the decades of 470 and 390 BCE), including works by the three great tragedians (Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides) and the comic playwright

5. One of the most frequently performed plays in the Festival: 2007, 2008, 2010, e 2012.

Aristophanes. Whenever possible, we compare Portuguese translations available in the editorial market and opt for those we deem most suited to the students' vocabulary - it is crucial to highlight that each cast must read the entire play, adapt it, and perform it, which is no small challenge. In this regard, we have noticed that the works of Brazilian translator Mário da Gama Kury have had the most positive connection with the groups, who have demonstrated a better ability to engage with his texts and memorize the lines more easily. Over the years, we have covered all the tragedies⁶ (*Oedipus Rex*, *Oedipus at Colonus*, *Antigone*, *Agamemnon*, *The Libation Bearers*, *The Eumenides*, *Medea*, *Hippolytus*, *The Trojan Women*, *The Persians*, *Electra* by Sophocles, *Hecuba*, *Iphigenia in Aulis*, *The Phoenician Women*, *The Bacchae*, *Prometheus Bound*, *Ajax*, *Alcestis*) and all the comedies⁷ (*The Clouds*, *Women Only*, *A God Called Money*, *The Wasps*, *The Birds*, *The Frogs*, *The Sex Strike*, and *The Women's Revolution*) translated by him. But the recommendations are not limited to Gama Kury's oeuvre. Particularly in the comedies, the choices made by this translator (with somewhat digressive updates) have led us to seek other versions of the plays, so we have already used Trajano Vieira's translation of *Lysistrata* and Junito Brandão's translations of *The Frogs* and *The Wasps*. In addition to all these translations mentioned, others have also been used: Trajano Vieira (*Heracles*, *Electra* by Euripides), José Ribeiro Ferreira (*The Suppliants and Helen*, the latter performed for the first time in 2022), Donaldo Schüller (*The Seven Against Thebes*), and Junito Brandão (*The Cyclops*, the only complete satirical drama of its kind that has survived to this day).

What does it mean to embody this Greek heritage? We follow the Spanish pedagogue Jorge Larrossa, who says:

The reconstruction and interpretation of the past is making the past count for the present, turning the past into an event of the present. Only in this way is the experience real. The experience of the past (...) is not a pastime, a mechanism of escape from the real world and the real self. Nor is it merely a means to acquire knowledge about what happened. (...) The interpretation of the past is only an experience when we take the past as something to which we must attribute meaning in relation to ourselves (2010: 135).

Larrossa contrasts this experience with indifference, which renders the experience of the past "harmless." In the case of tragedies, Aristotle, in his *Poetics*, becomes a theoretical guide for the experience, as one of the first literary critics of drama in the Greek world. He asserts that tragedy stages ethical questions by opposing character and thought. The catastrophes and their unpredictability - although tragedies are derived from myths already familiar to the Greeks, the

6. Plays compiled in the *Greek Tragedy* collection, published in six volumes by Jorge Zahar Editor.

7. Plays compiled in the *Greek Comedy* collection, published in three volumes by Jorge Zahar Editor.

unfolding of actions through opposing effects is what grants them beauty - suggest a rupture between the real and the imaginary. This leads to catharsis through fear and pity, making the philosopher regard tragic mimesis as an experience that can only be empirical, involving imagination and representation, placing actions into perspective:

(...) just as it is necessary in other mimetic arts that the imitation be of a single unified object, so too must the myth, because it imitates actions, imitate those that are unified and complete (...) For what does not alter the whole is not part of that whole. (Arist 1451a, 49.29).

The representation of a tragedy thus proposes a dual exercise by provoking reflections on both the past and the future, producing what Aristotle considered a practical effect, which makes Greek drama a classic in world literature.

During the three nights marking the culmination of the project, the class, both audience and cast at the same time, is invited to engage in the 'powerful social experiment,' daring to venture, in the controlled space of the classroom, into places and emotions they likely avoid in real life. Classical Athens ceases to be a mere page in a book or a Wikipedia article and becomes a lived, shared, embodied time. This is the kind of risk that Brazilian actress Fernanda Montenegro described during a lecture at the Brazilian Academy of Letters on September 20, 2016:

(...) The actor becomes confused with another absurd figure, the traveler, and like the traveler, the actor exhausts something that he endlessly traverses; he is the traveler of time (...) he is going to die within two or three hours under a face that is not his own. During those two or three hours, he must feel and express an entire exceptional destiny – and this has a certain name: it is to lose oneself in order to find oneself.⁸

8. MONTENEGRO, Fernanda. The actress as an interpreter of herself. Academia Brasileira de Letras Channel. Youtube, September 20, 2016. Available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5oltEzCkKbo&list=WL&index=9&ab_channel=AcademiaBrasileiradeLetras Accessed on August 12, 2022.

9. "(...) the teacher (historian) must never, under any circumstances, be a mere reproducer/transmitter, depositing knowledge in students, but must establish, in their professionalization, an organic relationship between teaching and research. This relationship does not mean turning teaching into research, but rather understanding that the articulation between how each one conceives of themselves as a teacher and the experience of living the teaching profession is historically produced (...) the purpose of history education is the formation of the learner's historical consciousness, and that this subject is in a dynamic relationship with the historical culture of the society in which they live". SCHMIDT, 2014, p. 54

10. "To compare Greeks and Africans is, certainly, an academic heresy. After all, on one side, we have those who are seen as the true creators of Western civilization, the inventors of philosophy, theater, and democracy. On the other hand, Africans are traditionally viewed as

Fernanda continues, "theater is a miracle of creation itself upon your body (...) it comes at the cost of your breath (...) we do not see ourselves; we only perceive ourselves. [It is] a sacred art because it is definitively carnified: it is not you watching and doing (...) you do all of this with yourself." In an era where cell phones and smartphones are progressively present in students' hands, the practice of theater proposes another form of interaction and knowledge, one not mediated by a screen and written characters but rather through the living skin and spoken word, both alive, strumming the strings of *logos* (reason) and *páthos* (emotion). As travelers in a foreign land, throughout this process, future history teachers come to understand that teaching is more than merely transmitting knowledge; it is the formation of an active historical consciousness, one that approaches the past with the lens of lived time⁹, deeply intertwined with the present.

One of the central topics in the current debate on history teaching focuses on playful elements and how school practices outside of the usual disciplinary rigidity can enhance learning and develop competencies. In this context, two authors were fundamental to the initial structuring of the project. Hélder Pinheiro (2007: 47) argues that "it is necessary to seek alternative approaches that avoid, above all, purely cognitive/informative schemes," and dramatic games offer creative responses to this need. These games are not intended for "virtuoso actors," but rather to "form players more concerned with mastering their discourse than creating an illusion" (2007: 48). Such games can take the form of full plays performed in a festival, but they may also consist of dramatized readings or choral performances, depending on the specific conditions of each school.

Portuguese author Terezinha Fialho believes that the primary goal of education "should be to help a growing human being to bring out the best in themselves and make them capable of using their aptitudes and potential" (1998: 15). To achieve this, elements like freedom and creativity must be ever-present and few environments are as conducive to exercising these qualities as the classroom theater, a didactic resource and teaching strategy that can be used by educators in any field (in our case, History). In this space of freedom and reinterpretation of one's limits, the "need to create, innovate, renew, embracing the unpredictability and natural risk of those who venture forth" is manifest. "There is no right or wrong in these games; it is all experience, living" (1998: 39). At a time when the very presence of Ancient History in Brazilian school curricula is under scrutiny, and much of its content particularly the

savage and irrational, particularly in Brazil, a country with a long history of slavery, which for a long time rejected the legacy of the various Black cultures that arrived here. The ideal of the progressive whitening of the Brazilian population was considered the solution to our 'racial problem' until the 1930s". ALVITO, 2002, p. 3.

11. "(...) Ancient history is gradually withdrawing as a definitive explanation of who we are". FRANCISCO, 2017, p. 50.

12. Transcription of the prologue adapted by Andréa Beltrão for the film *Antígona 442 B.C.* (2021), directed by Maurício Farias.

classical heritage is seen as linked to imperialist white domination, it becomes crucial that its teaching serves as a bridge over troubled waters, connecting ancient experiences to modern ones, reenacting “past thought encapsulated in a context of present thought that, by contradicting it, confines it to a different plane from their own” (Ferguson 2012: 15).

The years of the Greek Theater Festival have shown us that this bridge is frequently established with each new performance. In the distant year of 2007, during the second edition of the festival, electronic music set the pace for *Prometheus Bound*. In the 2018 performance of *Electra* by Sophocles, Clytemnestra entered the stage adorned as a queen of *Maracatu* (a cultural manifestation from Pernambuco with African origins that includes musical and dance elements), accompanied by servants dressed accordingly, holding a ceremonial canopy (*pálio*). A fundamental element of Brazilian Portuguese is a sort of hierarchy of dialects: accents from wealthier states (such as Rio de Janeiro or São Paulo) are often considered superior to those from poorer, peripheral regions like the Northeast (where the state of Pernambuco is located). The student-actors, however, infused the comedies with their Northeastern prosody, challenging the supposed inferiority so often imposed upon it. Moreover, due to the rituals, oracles, numerous gods, and ceremonies, students often recognize the similarities between Hellenic, Afro-Brazilian, and Indigenous¹⁰ polytheisms. This awareness can also manifest negatively: In an increasingly evangelical country a recurring issue at the Festival is students claiming they cannot participate in the plays due to religious restrictions. This was notably the case during the performance of *The Eumenides* by Sophocles, when a student argued she could not participate because “her mother had forbidden it” (even though she was of legal age) and especially because the main characters were “demons.” She was, of course, referring to the Erinyes, deities “immediately summoned to action whenever a murder was committed, particularly when the victim had family ties with their murderer” (Buxton 2019: 87). In this case, the “satanism” was entirely a projection of her own perception. The Festival creates opportunities for reflections on alterity, identities, and cultural exchanges urgent issues reflected in the agonistic struggles of the comedies and the terror of the tragedies performed at the Greek Theater Festival. These experiences echo the ancient Greek theatrical knowledge, especially in the democratic polis of Athens, where the public sphere converged in the celebration of the city-state's unity, encompassing political, religious, economic, and social aspects as a whole.

As an experienced reality, the performance expands the known horizon. Performing Greek tragedies and comedies in the classroom, much like in the ancient world, is both an individual and collective activity a correlation between all subjects, objects, and spaces involved. This process helps to put into perspective the sociopolitical and cultural reality of the ancient Greeks, but it also fosters self-awareness in relation to oneself and to others, as well as the world and the ideas both inside and outside the classroom. The classroom, in this sense, opens up like a grand

theater of experiences, where the student is no longer confined to merely sitting at a desk, passively observing their surroundings.

Conclusion

At this moment, when the demands for teaching History are a topic of discussion, one of the rare points of agreement among History professionals is the use of sources in the classroom as a means to enhance learning. Many resources are mentioned (games, cinema, memes, and so on), but we must not forget the fundamental role that literature plays in this context, especially in the formation of the History professional. In the words of Alfredo Bosi,

As a verbal adjective, *cultus* was attributed to the field that had already been plowed and planted by successive generations of farmers. *Cultus* carries within itself not only the action, always repeated, of *colo*, the cultivation through the centuries, but primarily the quality resulting from this work, now incorporated into the land that was tilled [...] something cumulative: the act itself of cultivating and the effect of countless tasks, which makes the participle *cultus*, this name that is a verb, a significantly denser and more lived form than the simple naming of present labor. [...] *Cultus* is a sign that the society that produced its food already has memory" (1992: 13).

It is the historian's task to till this field. It is our responsibility to present the harvest to our students, making them masters of this cultivated heritage—not as an untouchable treasure to be revered (and therefore inert), but rather as a living reservoir of experiences and customs with which they can interact. However, and just as importantly, in this process, the historian is not only the tiller but also the field to be tilled. The lack of literary foundation – in other words, the absence of participation in the memory of *cultus* – is detrimental to their development. As Hayden White asserts, the historian must "draw from the reservoir of *mythoi* provided by culture in order to construct facts and shape a particular kind of story, just as they must draw upon the same reservoir of *mythoi* present in the minds of their readers to imbue their account of the past with the scent of meaning or significance" (Souza Neto 2014: 9).

The original proposal of the Greek Theater Festival was based on this premise of presenting primary Greek sources to future teachers, not only to enhance their knowledge of the subject but also to ensure that this contact would significantly contribute to their cultural formation (Lopes 2025). It was not just another reading among the many undertaken throughout a higher education course, but rather the experience ("carnification") of a remnant from Antiquity, shared with all classmates in that subject, either on stage or in the audience a process of experimentation that will accompany them from that point onward.

However, as a living and ongoing project, the Greek Theater Festival has gradually incorporated new theoretical perspectives and faced challenges related to the evolving situation of teaching Ancient History in the national context. As Brazilian historian Gilberto da Silva Francisco (2017: 50) aptly stated, "if previously it was widely necessary, and its presence did not require justification, today, in many contexts, its existence is tied to a series of justifications." Tradition alone is no longer sufficient to sustain the teaching of Ancient History in Brazilian schools¹¹ We no longer look at Greece or Rome as sacred sources of our own identity, but rather cast a critical gaze upon these times and spaces, allowing us not only to see other world(s) beyond our own but also to place ourselves within a broader historical whole, to which we belong not as a distant periphery but as an essential part of it. The 'European modern project,' which 'forged a civilizational trajectory starting from Ancient History' (Francisco 2017: 55), would not have existed without the colonization of the Americas and the transatlantic slave trade. Thus, this belonging is ours by right, with all the particularities that our historical formation has afforded us. Moreover, performing Greek plays does not mean venerating our supposed first origin, but rather appropriating their content with our accents, historical heritages, and specific understandings. Tragedies, comedies, and satires take on our colors, voices, and references." As Brazilian historian Guilherme Moerbeck aptly noted,

(...) There is no antinomy between the teaching of Ancient History and some of the most urgent political and social issues in Brazil; on the contrary, there can be synergy between these distant themes and space-times. Critical teaching of Ancient History, rather than stifling voices made invisible by the ideological use of a distant and transcontinental past, can help us think of ways to understand issues relevant to Latin American countries, Indigenous populations, and many other social groups. The relevance of studying Ancient History in schools also lies in what exists beyond their walls, in the profound sociocultural dialogues it fosters. Whether through the multiple ways of disseminating knowledge in the realm of Public History (digital) or the various forms of entertainment and contemporary uses of the past, ancient histories and cultures are far more present in how we engage with our lifeworld than one might naively imagine (2021: 62-63).

Ancient History is not something distant from us, something that neither belongs to nor affects us. On the contrary, it is the stage for fierce disputes. In 2018, during the presidential campaign that would lead the far-right candidate Jair Bolsonaro to the presidency (2018–2022), an anonymous letter was posted on campus buildings by the politician's followers. In the letter, several history professors were individually named and accused of spreading "lies" in their classes, and warned that, with the candidate's victory, things would change. The letter ended with the ominous words: "There will be no theater. There will be class." The festival did not stop during Bolsonaro's presidency; it did not bow to the cowardly, philofascist threat. Today Bolsonaro is no longer presidente (although the threaten he embodies is far from dead) but I'm very proud to say

that, years after that dreadful letter, we do have classes and we still have theatre. In the words of Steven M. Oberhelman (2024: 7), “we need the Arts and Humanities major just as we need the STEM major. Yes, the world may be better off, if there were more engineers, scientists, and technologists; but it would be for the worse without the musician, writer, film director, and historian”.

It is fundamental that the teaching of Ancient History be aligned with the values that guide the teaching of History as a whole, promoting an “open dialogue with different mythologies, cultures, and beliefs to foster, among many other urgent demands of Brazilian society, religious tolerance” (Moerbeck 2021: 71) – something we have already described along the previous pages of this article. This is the spirit of the Greek Theater Festival, the celebration of the apprehension of Antiquity by today’s History students and tomorrow’s History teachers of the state of Pernambuco. We hope that, after such experience, they will have the same freedom with the classic text that Brazilian author Millôr Fernandes had when, enveloped by the darkness of the Brazilian Military Dictatorship (1964-85), wrote his prologue to Sophocles’ *Antigone*:

To the Greek citizen in the audience / what mattered to him / as he sat again to hear the same story again / was not the old legend: / it was the poet's new word. By placing today's citizen / attentive and waiting, / on equal footing with the Athenian / from so many centuries ago, / we provide a summary of the astounding story: / Creon, king of Thebes, avenges himself on Polynices, his nephew and enemy. / Antigone, Polynices' sister, / defies the king and is sentenced to death. / Haemon, the king's son and Antigone's fiancé, breaks with his father.

And so history advances, through fratricidal conflict, / mortal hatred, collective violence. / All paid for in the end, naturally, / with the people's enslavement, / in the final defeat. / We know well / that no one learned much / from this story by Sophocles. / Today's newspapers show / that even the Greeks themselves didn't learn. / And, tiresomely, it repeated itself / over the 2,400 years that followed: / Brutus' yearning, Christ's Cross, / Byzantium prostituted, Heil Hitler!, / Lumumba dismembered, Che in the mountains.

There are always two faces to the same coin: / One side, a hero; / the other, a tyrant. Something has changed, I know: ambition has changed its attire, / war, its vehicle, / power, its method. / The world has turned much, / but man has changed little. / However, repeating a story is our profession, our way of fighting. / So, we will tell it again, / very clearly. / And here is our reason: / we still don't believe that, in the end, / good always triumphs. / But we have begun to believe, moved, / that, in the end, evil doesn't always win either. / The hardest part of the fight / is figuring out which side to fight on.¹²

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