



ANCHIETA'S WRITING – SACRED AND PROFANE IN PORTUGUESE AMERICA

A ESCRITA DE ANCHIETA – SAGRADO E PROFANO NA AMÉRICA PORTUGUESA

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ABSTRACT

During the second half of the 16th century, the newly proclaimed saint of the Catholic Church resorted to the appropriation of the indigenous “pagan” vocabulary in order to convey the Catholic faith to native Brazilians and, taking advantage of the notions of sacred and profane in a rather literary construction, raised them from the condition of savages to sons of God, thus resembling the “white man”. The methodology used here is the reading and analysis of Anchieta’s theatrical work supported by historical, political and religious contextualization. As a result, it is argued that his plays had a humanizing character through which it was possible to provoke an awakening of consciousness (at least religious) in his audience. Based on the analysis of his theatrical literary production and aiming to have an honest look at its production, this article seeks to show that more than just a counter-reformist anticipation or form of cultural aggression, its literature is in some respects humanizing (in the reading of the time) and, by Ignatian molds, giver of meaning.

KEYWORDS: Anchieta; Literature; Sacred; Profane; Portuguese America.

RESUMO

Durante a segunda metade do século XVI, o recém proclamado santo da Igreja Católica recorreu à apropriação do vocabulário “pagão” indígena a fim de transmitir a fé católica aos nativos brasileiros e, tirando proveito das noções de sagrado e profano numa construção mais que literária, elevou-os da condição de selvagens a filhos de Deus, portanto, semelhantes ao “homem branco”. A metodologia aqui utilizada consiste na leitura e análise da obra teatral de Anchieta amparada por uma contextualização histórica, política e religiosa. Como resultado,

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defende-se a hipótese de que seus autos possuíam um caráter humanizador, através do qual era possível provocar um despertar de consciência (ao menos religiosa) em seu público. A partir da análise de sua produção literária teatral e buscando um olhar honesto sobre sua produção, o presente artigo procura mostrar que mais do que apenas uma antecipação contra reformista ou forma de agressão cultural, sua literatura mostra-se, em certos aspectos, humanizadora (na leitura da época) e, pelos moldes inicianos, doadora de sentido.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Anchieta; Literatura; Sagrado; Profano; América Portuguesa.

Introduction

This article focuses on a panoramic view of the Anchietaian literary work, having as its fundamental focus his theatrical production on the 16th century's coast of Colonial Brazil. Due to the great diversity of his production, it is impossible to cover all its aspects in one study. Thus, in this work we chose not to enter the merits of style, but only historical and content analysis, in order to contribute to Anchieta's literary and sociological study.

For this article, we analyzed the twelve autos attributed to Anchieta (ANCHIETA, 1977). Taking into account the limitations of space, it was decided to treat the interesting aspects of its production in general, detailing its approach and quoting it when necessary. Consequently, three autos appears more explicitly in this text. The "Auto de São Lourenço" ("Saint Lawrence Auto"), an adaptation of his first play ("At the Christmas" or "Universal Preaching") performed during the feast of the homonym saint in 1587 (or 1583. See ANCHIETA, 1977, 141), the "Dia da Assunção, Quando levaram sua imagem a Reritiba" ("Mary's Assumption Day, when they took its statue to Reritiba"), staged in 1590, and the "Auto da Visitação de Santa Isabel" ("Auto of the Visitation of Saint Elizabeth"), his last work, performed at the Visitation feast in 1597. Thus, not exhausting the subject, the text sheds light on aspects not yet studied in the work of the Canarian poet and opens space for further discussions about the evangelization program undertaken by Anchieta.

The Canarian Context

For a better understanding of the problem, it is necessary to situate, even briefly, the cultural and historical moment lived by Anchieta and the Catholic Church. A direct reflection of the Renaissance, 15th century humanism made deep criticism of the orthodox theocentrism of Catholic Church in the face of the effervescence of sciences and arts, proposing anthropocentric solutions. In addition, with the publication of Luther's 95 theses in 1517, the Protestant Reformation began, criticizing several points of Catholic doctrine and proposing radical changes within the Church. In response to this movement, in 1545 the Council of Trent began, which, as the engine of the so-called Counter-Reformation (or Catholic Reformation) by which the Roman Church made a complete revision of its discipline and reaffirmed dogmatic points of its doctrine; among other interesting measures, has recognized new religious orders such as the

Society of Jesus and encouraged catechesis of the New World².

Within this troubled historical, religious and social context, it was born in 1534, on the Tenerife Island of the Canary Archipelago, under Spanish rule, José de Anchieta. At fourteen, José goes to study at the Royal College of Arts in Coimbra, and in 1551 is received as a novice at the Society of Jesus. Two years later, at the request of Father Manuel da Nóbrega, Anchieta and six other colleagues are sent to Brazil. Already in those lands, he remains just under three months in São Salvador and leaves for São Vicente, where he founds the Colégio São Paulo [College of Sao Paulo] on the plateau of Piratininga. Having lived closely with the Indigenous people for most of his life, he participated in various political negotiations on the coast of the country, was appointed Provincial of the Society of Jesus in Brazil, wrote several autos, poems and letters, and a grammar of the Tupi language. After living 63 years, died in 1597 in Reritiba (nowadays Anchieta city, Espírito Santo state).

The catechetical theater

Within possible dramatic influences on Anchieta's formation, one is a consensus among scholars: Gil Vicente's production. Although their theatrical production is still strongly linked to Christian values, they already reflect humanistic values in seeking to reach and provoke human consciousness. The sometimes comic but less satirical aspect of the characters in which we would expect a strong dramatic accent confirms that.

As argued by Armando Cardoso (ANCHIETA, 1977, p. 14-15), it is almost certain that Anchieta had extensive contact with Gil Vicente's plays in Coimbra³. In addition, Anchieta's autos seem to have inherited much of the style⁴ and ideas⁵ of the Portuguese theater's father. However, the peninsular forms and content have been reshaped by the indigenous mentality through Anchieta's assimilating vision and this is precisely where their originality lies, - as explained by Cardoso (ANCHIETA, 1984, p. 195) - despite of the influences of metropolis, the structure of their autos is inspired by a frequent and normal spectacle that was becoming frequent and regular among the Brazilian Indigenous people: the reception of an illustrious and sometimes unknown character.

Although its audience is also made up of several other groups such as settlers, soldiers, sailors, and fixed or transitory villagers, its main target has always been the indigenous

2 To see more about the context: BOXER, 1981.

3 Gil Vicente's autos were very popular at that time, especially in the university town where Anchieta lived for 5 years (NAVARRO, 1999, p. VII).

4 Among the stylistic aspects they have in common we can list the use of simple rhymes, the larger *redondilha*, the quintile stanza, among others.

5 The personifications of goodness and badness through the figures of the angel and the devil (the latter sometimes being bragging, joking) are other references to Vincentian influence in Anchieta's theater.

community. Due to that, Anchieta devoted himself especially to the Tupi language when writing autos intended for catechesis in order to reach the Indigenous people more effectively, which did not exempt him from serving other audiences, having also written extensively in Latin, Portuguese and Castilian. More than that - following the Jesuit evangelism program, which will later become one of the Society's trademarks - in addition to its linguistic appeal, he also took advantage of the natural inclinations of foresters to singing and dancing, including these elements throughout their presentations - either in their native form or in that imported from the metropolis.

All people in all ages have always made the distinction between sacred and profane. "Sacred", an Indo-European word meaning "separated", can be understood, in its most primitive sense, as a quality that is attributed to powers over which man has no control and consequently recognizes as superior to himself, participants in a divine dimension, "separated" from their simple "profane" reality (GALIMBERTI, 2003, p. 12). The term "profane", literally translated "before or outside the temple", in turn embraces the sphere of the secular, reflecting all that is temporal and common, a category sometimes overlooked for its banal appearance.

Both above mentioned categories represent antagonistic aspects, regardless of the cultural context to which they belong. According to Eliade (2010, p. 20), they "constitute two modalities of being in the World, two existential situations assumed by man throughout his history". This opposition was also present, of course, in the newly found Brazilian lands, since even the indigenous people brought with them these notions - although in a different way from the European ideas, they also presented this duality present in their culture. Anchieta knew how to take advantage of this situation and made use of these categories in the construction and execution of the Indigenous catechization process. Anchieta's evangelizing endeavor consisted precisely in using this common substratum between the two cultures - the sacred and profane conception and their different conceptual and symbolic forms - in order to enter that new cultural universe and to convey the aimed message more easily, which was very nasty for the colonization procedure.

Thus, Anchieta's appropriation of indigenous mythological-cultural ideas was not only due to the assimilation of their vocabulary and traditions, but especially to the use and readjustment of its concepts. For this purpose, during the auto's presentation, figures badly regarded by Indigenous people - as their enemies - were identified with the devil and his fallen angels, and esteemed figures - such as shamans and the Caribbean (a kind of shaman) - were in turn related to Jesuit angels, saints and priests. In the "Auto de São Lourenço" ("Saint Lawrence Auto"), trilingual play of 1583, for instance, the demon characters who bear the names of Tamoio chiefs identify themselves in a way that scares the Indians:

Guaixará:

I'm drunk Guaixará
I'm snake, jaguar,
anthropophagic, aggressor,
winged spectral bat,
I'm a slayer demon.

Aimbirê:

I'm python, I'm a tiger heron,
the great tamoio Aimbirê.
Anaconda, spotted hawk,
I'm a shaggy anteater,
I'm a bright demon.

(ANCHIETA, 1997, p. 59-60, our translation)⁶

However, association of concepts did not stop in superficiality. Also, the deities and the hierarchy were associated, *Tupã* became the one Christian God,

[...] Bishop is *Pai-guaçu*, that is, the greater shaman. Blessed Mother sometimes appears under the name of *Tupansy*, mother of Tupã. The kingdom of God is *Tupãretama*, land of Tupã. Church is consistently *tupãóka*, house of Tupã. [...] Demon is *anhaga*, wandering and dangerous spirit. For the biblical-Christian figure of the angel, Anchieta coined the word *karaibebê*, flying prophet [...]. (BOSI, 1992, p. 65, our translation)⁷

This nascent representation of sacred corresponded to a new symbolic sphere derived from the Christian tradition and Tupi culture, a hybridism that, according to Bosi, was made possible only by the singular colonial conditions.

For the conversion to take place, many indigenous practices would have to be tackled and

6 Guaixará:

Sou Guaixará embriagado
sou boicininga, jaguar,
antropófogo, agressor,
andira-guaçu alado,
sou demônio matador.

Aimbirê:

Sou jibóia, sou socó,
o grande Aimbirê tamoio.
Sucuri, gavião malhado,
sou tamanduá desgrenhado,
sou luminoso demônio.

7 [...] bispo é *Pai-guaçu*, quer dizer, pajé maior. Nossa Senhora às vezes aparece sob o nome de *Tupansy*, mãe de Tupã. O reino de Deus é *Tupãretama*, terra de Tupã. Igreja, coerentemente é *tupãóka*, casa de tupã. [...] Demônio é *anhaga*, espírito errante e perigoso. Para a figura bíblico-cristã do anjo, Anchieta cunha o vocábulo *karaibebê*, profeta voador [...].

permanently abandoned. Those included anthropophagy, witchcraft, polygamy, communication with the spirits of the dead and *caipunagem* (recurrent drunkenness by cauim, a strong drink produced from the fermentation of tubers such as cassava):

Good measure is to drink
cauim until vomiting.
 This is a way of enjoying
 life, and it is recommended
 for those who want to enjoy.
 [...]
 Walking killing with fury,
 Living together, eat
 each other, and yet being
 a spy, arresting *Tapuia*,
 dishonest the honor to lose. (ANCHIETA, 1997, p. 48, our translation)⁸
 This *cauim* is what hinders
 your spiritual grace.
 Lost in Bacchanal
 your spirits shrink
 in our fatal lace.
 (ANCHIETA, 1997, p. 61, our translation)⁹

Anchieta was faced with a great challenge in standing against indigenous practices that were averse to European moralizing thinking, as these were common and consummate practices that marked the cohesion of groups and were still filled with a religious-sacramental character. Both acts (indigenous practices such as anthropophagy and *caipunagem*) could be celebrated individually or interconnected in day-long celebrations. In order to combat them, Anchieta

8 Boa medida é beber
 cauim até vomitar.
 Isto é jeito de gozar
 a vida, e se recomenda
 a quem queira aproveitar.
 [...]

Andar matando de fúria,
 Amancebar-se, comer
 um ao outro, e ainda ser
 espião, prender Tapuia,
 desonesto a honra perder.

9 Esse cauim é que tolhe
 sua graça espiritual.
 Perdidos no bacanal
 seus espíritos se encolhem
 em nosso laço fatal.

coined the term *angaipaba* (which in Tupi would mean something like “things of the wicked soul”), by which he introduced the notion of sin:

– Let’s escape from the village,
Before they kick us out!
Yes! Let’s go fast
To take *sins* away!

(From the Auto “Dia da Assunção, Quando levaram sua imagem a Reritiba”.
In ANCHIETA, 1977, p. 252, our translation and emphasis)¹⁰

In addition, as already said, Anchieta also made extensive use of the association’s feature within his autos, demonizing the Indigenous’ practices by marking them as the fruit of the inspiration of evil spirits who wanted for themselves the possession of the souls of those poor men who, while “numb” in their rites, became vulnerable to their perverse coercion.

Through the catechesis autos that, by their simple and dynamic matter, were the simplest and most accessible way to reach the public and enable them to understand sometimes abstract contents, it became possible to instill in the natives the moral and the main dogmas, thus representing undeniable influence over their habits and traditions.

With the scope of conversion, Anchieta’s Jesuit artistic-theatrical program first sought to capture the viewer for itself, achieving his imagination through which he made room for the entrance of hidden intellectual arguments which were more easily accepted. By using the sensible representation (visual and audible) of death and perpetual punishment, the fear of this punishment was aroused in the public and, consequently, the assent of the truths of faith. (FILHO, 1966, p. 190).

One must, however, see this movement not with the eyes of the 21st century, but from the perspective of the 16th century. Anchieta must have been influenced, perhaps since childhood, but especially during the novitiate, by the medieval morality autos, which carry a dense, moralizing and pedagogical aesthetic. Thus, being aware of the reality surrounding Anchieta (a culture previously unknown and arguably opposed to his own) and the ideology that marked his formation (corresponding to his own time), it becomes possible to read his work from a less prejudiced and intellectually more honest perspective.

Anchieta’s greatest wish was undoubtedly to convert as many as he could in order to “save” as many souls as possible. The “apostle of the Indigenous people” was not aware (because it was not a concern of his time) of the irreparable cultural destruction resulting from the imposition of the new civilizing values of the Metropolis. However, among most of the time, which instilled their values with iron and fire, he was the least energetic in his actions and the mildest in the form

10 – Neí! Tiasó tanjé
angaipába amo rerú... (Tupi’s original version)
– Eia! Vamos depressa
longe os pecados levar... (Portuguese translation)

Diadorim, Rio de Janeiro, vol. 21, Especial, p. 134-143, 2019.

of evangelization, including and enabling manifestations of native culture. Proof of this is the fact that he is “the only national playwright to use tupi” (PONTES, 1978, p. 84).

Another argument in this regard is the appreciation that Anchieta also gives to indigenous rituals by incorporating them into his autos. In addition to music and dance, the ritual of receiving visitors who are considered friends is almost always present in their records - to meet the future guest still on the way to the village and to accompany him in a festive way was a common practice of the Indigenous. This practice was reproduced in Anchieta’s autos and used by him for the reception of political and religious figures.

A Counter-Reformation literature

Anchieta’s intentions in writing his autos were not primarily aesthetic, but rather didactic, and this linguistic objective that overlaps the literary is noticeable in his work in the conscious sacrifice of literature, in view of the range and understanding of the pieces by his audience (PONTES, 1978, p. 15).

Since the entire literary production of Anchieta, especially that aimed at the didactic purposes of catechesis, is permeated by a dramatic accent that goes back to medieval tradition and morality, but which concomitantly points to baroque aesthetics; the deficiency of delimitation of Anchietaian literature¹¹ only as a 16th century becomes evident.

In Anchieta’s literary production one can notice a certain medievalism (in the technical¹² and aesthetic sense) expressed in his devotional and didactic-moral thinking, strongly imbued with the medieval spirit. In addition to the use of allegories and assimilation of devils to deities and indigenous characters (as done with the pagans in general), the opposition between the anti-earthly spirit of medieval religiosity and the indigenous anthropophagic paganism of these lands is also explicit.

This medieval facet of Anchieta is very explicit in the “Auto da Visitação de Santa Isabel” (“Auto of the Visitation of Saint Elizabeth”), considered the last play written by the Jesuit in 1597, where there is a catechetical dialogue between Saint Elizabeth and a pilgrim, who enquires her, following scholastic patterns, about the divine judgment, of Mary and her virginity, addressing in a simple way a Catholic moral and dogmatic content. As reminded by Cardoso (ANCHIETA, 1977, p. 361), at the end of this play there is another fact that brings it

11 Here remains a modern controversy about the possibility of considering Anchieta production as literature and, even more, as Brazilian literature. There is a consensus today that the first Brazilian literary manifestations do not constitute a literary school. According to Antonio Candido (1999, p. 18-20), although Anchieta has produced literary works in his autos, the Brazilian literature will emerge only in the 18th century, when the reference points of these “literary manifestations” are no longer external and linked to the Metropolis, allowing the creation of a fully local literature.

12 Medieval technique and poetics in Anchieta’s literature are topics widely discussed in Leodegário A. Azevedo Filho’s thesis (1962), in which he claims that there is no Renaissance influence, at least in his production in the Portuguese language.

closer to many of Gil Vicente's records - a poem "sung in farewell procession" by all present.

At the same time, themes that will be frequent and iconic in Baroque art and literature, such as the fugacity of time, the ephemerality of earthly life and the inanity of mundane things are also present, albeit in a germ or veiled form, in Anchieta's production with the purpose of motivating conversion by the *postmortem* life idea and possible eternal damnation after divine judgment.

Thus, Anchieta's literature presents itself as extremely original, a legitimate echo of medieval morality and anticipation of the counter-reformist proposal in Amerindian America.

Conclusion

The task of penetrating the Indigenous imagination and transmitting the Catholic religious message to them was not easy, and Anchieta accomplished it through the theater and its resources. Anchieta's literature, however, was not limited to this. Deeply influenced by the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola (founder of the Society of Jesus), Anchieta demonstrates this in his autos and sermons. Even in his letters, unlike those eminently administrative-pragmatic of his comrades, it is noticed that "mystical vein which every religious work ultimately presupposes" (BOSI, 2003, p. 19).

From the analysis of his texts, one can see that the purpose of his oratory was not only to "convert" the indigenous and / or "keep the faith in" the settlers - as so many people claim and as would be most expected in a counter-reform movement. Rather, and attached to it, the aim was to "provoke" its audience to a mostly religious awakening of consciousness.

What Anchieta did through most of his autos was to provoke the *thaumázein* (in Greek, it is the expression for perplexity, wonder or astonishment that leads to reflection) in the audience through artifices such as the surprise or the comic. In this way, he exposed a given circumstance or aspect of reality, previously ignored or not perceived, as problematic and that, therefore, should be better thought and worked out. More than a mere attempt at conversion, Anchieta's literature proves to be a unique mode of personal provocation that encourages a search for meaning.

Anchieta's literature, as a poetic work, acts as a way of rescuing the truly human (therefore, sacred) and can overcome barriers by transferring the indigenous character from the profane circle, within which it had been prejudiced by "civilized" man, to the sacred sphere, one who can be part of the Christian community and sit at the table. In Anchieta, the Indigenous loses the necessary appearance of an evil wild man by nature and becomes a creature like any other, capable of God and good. Desired by both saints and devils, defended by angels, and by the Mother of God, the Indigenous becomes free from worldly slavery and able to make his own choices (at least spiritually).

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