

From Orality to Writing: The Reality of a Conversion through the Work of the Jesuit Father José de Anchieta (1534–1597)

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We are in 1563, somewhere on a Brazilian beach about 100 kilometres north of what is now São Paulo. A young man in a cowled robe alone on the beach is writing a poem on the sand with the point of his stick. The hostage of a savage tribe for weeks, he struggles daily against manifold carnal temptations, personified in the voluptuous native women who come to visit him every evening in his hammock, and addresses his Latin verses to the Virgin Mary in order to fortify his virtue. The threat of being killed and eaten by cannibals is nothing to him by comparison with the loss of his virginity. Recourse to his own original culture is the ultimate bulwark against contamination, the sign of resistance and strengthening of his identity. The definitive rejection of the Other is, in these circumstances, a survival reflex.

This largely fictitious scene¹ would be no more than pure anecdote if it did not demarcate so precisely the boundary that it is writing's function to recall and to shift in a country of exclusively oral culture. This beach is the symbolic space of the transition between Europe and America. The poem in question was to become the 'De Beata Virgine Dei Matre Maria', a text 5,732 lines long, when, back among his own people, the young brother wrote it down from memory, according to tradition. Now, this individual was none other than José de Anchieta, one of the first Jesuit missionaries in America, the person whom histories of national literature credit with being the first 'Brazilian' author. Both the first attempts to write down the indigenous language and the first literary works composed in Brazil are in fact attributed to him. His polymorphous oeuvre tackled every genre, ranging from a grammar of the indigenous language, published at Coimbra in 1595,² to the writing of dramatic texts in three languages (Spanish, Portuguese and Tupi), via lyric poetry in Tupi, song, epic, Latin sermons, letters and historical writings.³ Jesuit historiography, which that of the laity most often followed closely, constructed out of nothing the image of this linguistic cross-breed, which initiated the totality of the processes of transmission and cultural adaptation peculiar to colonization by integrating elements of indigenous culture into a scholarly work. The subsequent representations of "the apostle of Brazil", always shown in a tropical forest setting, in total empathy with the wild animals and the natives, were to come to be lined up alongside the first, without any apparent contradiction. The point shared by all these fictions was Anchieta's role as close mediator. He became the person who transformed the oral, the experience of the intimate, into writing, visible to all. The originality of this operation, what interests us about it here, lies in the fact that

it was not done as a translation but as a 'reduction', in the literal sense of the word, a 're-leading' into the ways of the Lord. What was unspeakable, savage and monstrous, should, thanks to writing, become part of a reasonable and comprehensible structure. Anchieta is no more than a sign here, the writing for which he was responsible seeming like one of the essentials of evangelism. The act of the writer is therefore inseparable from the practices and mediations in play in conversion. The internal logic of Anchieta's production and its articulation with the Jesuits' vast undertaking thus make it possible to rediscover the memory of the conversion of the New World entirely from the words of the Old, which needed to write them down in order to conquer it.

Brazil before the arrival of the Jesuits

If we free ourselves from the fictions of the birth of Brazil which have for too long been admissible under the double weight of nationalist and colonialist historiographies, the few virtually indisputable elements of the Brazilian reality before 1549 reveal the fragility of the demarcations between the groups in place on the ground at the very outset of the colonial process. The myth of the fusion of the races, the most recurrent topos in the historiography, is only a half-truth. Genetic, linguistic and social mixes were effectively the rule, but in an extremely violent and accelerated fashion. Very often, the Brazilian experience is skimmed over quickly, using the racial categories Negro, European and Indian as if each of them constituted a basis for identity sufficient to define the practices of every individual. However, this does not agree with any reality on the ground; it is evident that, with rare exceptions, almost all the populations that happened to meet in Brazil in the first decades of the sixteenth century had lost, or were in the process of losing, contact with the certainties of their past. Neither the Portuguese colonists, nor the black Africans, nor the natives who had contact with the whites, could constitute a dominant society capable of attracting the others. Obviously, this reality has to be inflected. The proportions of the populations varied from one point in the territory to another, and the power relationships were being constantly readjusted.

In 1549, when the governor-general Tomé de Sousa arrived, there were only three Portuguese enclaves that were evidence of an effective white presence. At Pernambuco, the colony governed by Duarte Coelho experienced relative prosperity, because the latter invested his own capital in the development of several sugar mills. The Portuguese settlement had its own name, 'Nova Lusitania', which at least gave substance to a plan for development. At São Vicente, in the present-day region of São Paulo, the little village founded on the coast by Martim Afonso de Sousa in 1530, and quickly abandoned by him, stagnated wretchedly. However, there was intense activity in the interior of the country. In fact, the distinctive contours of the region dictated two strategies. The coastal belt was cut off from the hinterland by the crest of the São Paulo plateau, which then descends towards the immense basin of the rivers Paraná and Paraguay. Communications between the two areas are difficult, the coastal town of São Vicente depending, moreover, on the supply of essential products from the interior. Since transatlantic trade demanded investments that only a few rare privileged individuals could make, the main activity took place on the plateau, where some Portuguese traded with the Spanish and became integrated within the age-old exchange networks of the Tupi-Guarani and Tupinikin Indians. Marriages

and the necessary commercial alliances required gave birth to *mamelucos*, offspring of a white man and an Indian woman.

At Bahia, fifty-odd Portuguese survived, assailed by tribes in a permanent state of agitation. You have to imagine a few cabins and the fearful colonists who do not dare go outside a small area protected by a mud palisade. Most of them get their supplies by bartering with the Tupinikin tribes who have settled nearby. Elsewhere, the Portuguese presence has been completely wiped out, as the few Portuguese settlements of Porto Seguro and Espirito Santo, left to their own devices, were unable to resist the pressure exerted by the native tribes.

Some evidence can be detected. Forgotten by the authorities in Lisbon, the survival of all the settlements ultimately depended only on the permeability of native and Portuguese societies, Brazilian originality residing essentially in the fact that this phase lasted long enough to bring about the irreversible phenomenon of biological interbreeding. In effect, between 1530 and 1550 for Bahia, and until the end of the century at least for São Vicente, the Portuguese constituent was broadly in the minority, as there was a sore shortage of white women. The African element was equally insignificant for this period, since the colonists did not have the capital necessary to purchase black slaves. This was the essential reason for the bitter struggle embarked upon by the colonists in order to obtain native slaves.

Dialogue with the Indians was thus absolutely vital, implying the gradual emergence of a mixed category within each of the two societies present there, one of mediators, people who were often called 'interpreters'. This category of individuals was mixed because it united Portuguese specialized in relations with Indians and Indians specialized in relations with the whites. Only the most famous examples are known, but it seems clear that each contact zone generated mediators. On the Portuguese side, João Ramalho, the *bacharel de Cananeia* ("the bachelor of Cananeia"), or Diego Alvares Caramuru experienced far-reaching celebrity thanks to this function which they assumed between the two worlds. These mysterious individuals who the captains found settled among the natives from 1530 were evidence of great seniority on the land, and they created powerful links with the native chiefs by marrying their daughters. They appear in the documents from the time of the voyage of Martim Afonso de Sousa in 1530, agreeing to collaborate with the new arrivals without, however, ever becoming integrated into the European core. They all preserved positions on the margins, sometimes going so far as conflict with the authorities who constantly sought to bring them into the colony. João Ramalho gathered *mamelucos*, Indians and Portuguese around him and created the town of Santo André da Borda do Campo, in the Paulista hinterland, the administrative suppression of which was obtained by the Jesuits in 1560. The *bacherel*, who has never been identified with any certainty, lived for a while at a trading post he had founded south of São Vicente, then disappeared. Diego Alvares, in the Bahia region, preserved a kind of extra-territoriality until the end of his life. However, he was more involved in the Portuguese society, which was developing rapidly around the country's new capital, from 1549 onwards. These men took over tasks as varied as the victualling of passing ships, the recruitment and training of interpreters, the sale of slaves or the recruitment of Indians for wars undertaken by the Portuguese. On the other hand, they assured their Indian allies of the support of the whites against enemy tribes, a whole range of iron artefacts and weapons negotiated with the colony. Scraps of knowledge also circulated in both senses of the word, notably agricultural, medical and military techniques.

On the Indian side, the same phenomenon is to be found with the emergence of the 'principals', chiefs who increased their prestige and their power by being intermediaries with the Portuguese. A long list of names is recorded in a brief but repetitive manner in the documentary sources: Pindobucu, Aembiré, Cunhambeba, Jagoanharo and Tibiriçá, and with them the obscure people we find in the wake of missionaries or those prospecting for gold and precious stones, of whom we know only that they guided the expeditions and had dealings with tribes they happened to meet. They all led a dual existence, swapping prestige and objects for their knowledge of languages and the terrain. The chiefs were, like their Portuguese counterparts, suppliers of manpower or logistical support for military campaigns. These mediations operated in an absolutely reciprocal fashion in so far as power relations were equal, disappearing everywhere except in the very south of the country when Portuguese society began to take shape, between 1575 and 1585.

It is thus possible to give formal expression to the frontiers between groups beyond racial divisions, by following the spatial boundaries. The categories of colonizer and Indian fragmented. There was nothing in common between the son of the Schetz, a great Flemish family that had invested in the setting-up of a sugar mill near São Vicente, and Antonio Rodrigues, a Portuguese mercenary who was to be found in the same place after serving for twenty years in the Spanish armies, and who founded Rio de la Plata and Asunción. One focused on the sea and Europe, the other on the interior of the continent. The latter spoke all the languages in use in the country and stayed in permanent contact with all the oral cultures; the other remained immersed in European culture, dominated by writing. Antonio Rodrigues was to end up entering the Society of Jesus to devote himself to the education of children, while Gaspar Schetz, baron of Wesemael and lord of Grobbendonck, ended his life at Mons in 1584, after having considerably increased his fortune in Brazil.

For the natives, there was a similar process of subdivision. The only Indians who appear in the sources are those who lived in contact with the Portuguese. The others were relegated to absolute and sub-human savagery. However, among them, one should still distinguish those who had contact with the colony and those whose eyes were turned towards the forest that was still unknown to the Europeans, always ready to take refuge there. The two opposing figures of the principal chief and the shaman, one engaged in mediation with the Portuguese, the other unswervingly opposed and dwelling in the interior, perfectly embody the two attitudes that everybody had either to oppose or be reconciled to.

These positions impacted, in short, on relations with language and culture. The natives whom the Portuguese encountered on the coasts almost all belonged to the same linguistic branch and spoke a series of idioms relatively close to each other, certainly to the extent of making it possible for individuals from different tribes to communicate with each other. This was what the Portuguese called the *lingua geral*, the general language of the Tupi-Guaranis of Pernambuco and Rio de la Plata. However, it seems clear that the variants must have been significant, although imperceptible or reducible before any attempt at written codification. Language aside, the social systems and diverse rituals were relatively stable from one tribe to another. Before the arrival of the governor-general, they all remained problematically on the edge of the colony, if one is to believe the descriptions of the Jesuits in 1549.⁴ A significant part of the population probably participated in two types of ceremony, the Mass as a cannibalistic rite, or the simple *cahouins*, festivals gathering together several tribes around alcohol and fermented manioc. The Portuguese, for their part, were very few in number. Portuguese women were rarest of all. Moreover, the first

arrivals were often the *degradados* (the condemned, whose punishment had been commuted into years of exile), converted Jews, or 'men of the people', that is, men who were not bearers of the educated culture of the Iberian peninsula. The language they spoke was often mixed with Spanish and poorly constructed. It should be remembered that in Portugal the great grammatical codification occurred in the mid-sixteenth century, a century before French but too late for the ill-educated men, who for the most part left between 1530 and 1540, to be able to make use of the resulting knowledge. Cultural manifestations in the colony probably amounted to a few sporadic expressions of popular culture, such as open-air performances of farces on trestle stages. Religious life was not very active, since the clergy destined for the colonies before the Council of Trent were little concerned for either the physical or the moral well-being of the colonists.

It will be understood that the cultural, linguistic and ethnic frontiers were extremely porous. For fifty long years, Brazil was a place without writing, the incomprehensible melting-pot of fluctuating and unstable mixtures. The natives and the Portuguese no longer resembled what they had been before, without, however, giving any glimpse of what they were to become.

Everything was to change with the arrival of the governor-general and the first Jesuits in March 1549. Indeed, the primary sources, which are very fragmentary until this point,⁵ become more consistent. The new arrivals reported the situation regularly to their respective hierarchies. The Jesuits were obliged to send annual reports, then four-monthly from 1554, to their tutelary authorities, Rome and Lisbon, and the governor corresponded annually with the king. A transitory period then started which was to see the gradual imposition of a way of writing the history of the new country.

The totality of relations between the various actors of colonization, complicated by the joint arrival of the representatives of the Crown and the first missionaries, conferred on writing a new political and cultural value. The Jesuits were to understand this very well, and took its entire importance upon themselves by very rapidly taking control of most of the voices raised from within Brazil and by developing a veritable strategy of writing.

The position of the Jesuits

The Society of Jesus had been in existence for barely nine years when the first of its missionaries set foot in America, at Salvador de Bahia. The Portuguese king João III granted them the monopoly of missions in his overseas empire, by virtue of the rights of patronage granted by the Papacy since the twelfth century. The first mission was composed of six members under the responsibility of the superior, Manuel da Nóbrega, a man of about thirty, a doctor in canon law from the University of Coïmbra, and an experienced missionary who had already taught in the tough rural areas of northern Portugal. The others were men of little education, without any intellectual baggage and inexperienced. None was really prepared for catechesis in the New World, to which they had, however, to adjust, without any hope of return. The sole imperative imposed on the Jesuits was that of obeying the orders of the king, upon whom they depended from every point of view. The king expressed himself clearly in the regulations⁶ which he gave to the governor-general, Tomé de Sousa. This document fixed the bargaining framework which the governor-general was to offer to the Portuguese colonists. In exchange for security,

assured by the contingent of soldiers which accompanied the fleet, the colonists were to pay taxes and organize the development of the territory. This was to be effected by social control and respect for public morality, as well as by the progressive integration of good Indians, who alone would suffice to counter the numerical shortage of the whites. Royal officers were to be the instruments of this policy. The moral regulation of the colony and the education of the natives in settlements created for that purpose on the frontiers of the Portuguese settlement naturally fell to the religious. Unfortunately, the effective support that this presupposed was cruelly lacking, as the Jesuits and the governor-general came into conflict with colonists who had little inclination to renounce their earlier freedom. They were thus compelled to improvise. This attempt at modernization (*aggiornamento*) lasted three years, ending lamentably when a new governor, Dom Duarte da Costa, broke the precarious alliance between missionaries and governor-general to range himself on the colonists' side. It was at precisely this time that the young brother José de Anchieta arrived with the second Jesuit mission. He immediately became part of the cohort which Father Nóbrega took away to the south, to São Vicente. Drawing conclusions from the setback at Bahia, the superior set a new strategy in train. It was a case of abandoning the colonial society to turn towards the Indians. He planned the foundation of a town on the São Paulo plateau, São Paulo de Piratininga, by rounding up two Tupinikin tribes living in the area, controlled by the fathers alone. Anchieta was to be one of the kingpins of this policy, accompanied by a dozen recruits, all used to contact with Indians. Many were young people recruited on the spot for their grasp of relations with the natives. Antonio Rodrigues, the old soldier already mentioned, ended his career there, like Pero Correia, a prosperous colonist and slave-hunter who had just experienced his own Damascus road conversion. It is from this period that Anchieta's first writings date: he had been entrusted by Nóbrega to justify this new form of catechesis to Portugal, with the Jesuit provincial and the king, who was always reading over his shoulder.

At the end of two years they were compelled to admit the failure of direct catechesis, with the Indians fleeing from Piratininga and the colonists no longer hesitating to attack the Indian populations directly to replenish their slaves. Without any protection or support, Nóbrega returned to Bahia, criticized and disowned at the very heart of the mission. The arrival in 1558 of the third governor, Mem de Sá, who, himself isolated, relied on the Jesuits in order to carry to a successful conclusion the resumption of control over the colony, was fortunately to make it possible for a new plan to be formulated aiming to place the converted Indians under the protection and control of the officers of the Crown. The violent repression of the Indian tribes immediately made it possible to create villages by force, around Bahia, where the good Indians – prisoners and 'volunteers' alike – were regrouped under the exclusive jurisdiction of the Jesuits. This strategy made control of the colonists possible, making the governor and the missionaries the indispensable agents for the resolution of the Indian problem. Military force at first, social and religious education afterwards, appeared to be a process of domestication that could supply manpower for the sugar mills and the army. Thus the thousand or so Tupinikins who participated in the capture of the fort of Coligny in 1560,⁷ controlled by the fathers, came from the villages around São Vicente and Bahia. Despite the perpetual tensions, the compromise remained viable as long as the human reserves made it possible. The scarcity of the natives, as well as the numerical increase in the African slave trade between 1570 and 1580, reallocated roles and relaunched conflicts.

To summarize the positions occupied by the mission in Brazil, one might say that it remained in the framework fixed by the Crown since 1549, by securing the transition of the native populations to the Portuguese colony. Civilizing meant above all educating and controlling by effacing the traces of the culture of origin. Baptism was first and foremost a certificate of entry into the Portuguese community, the religious aspect proper remaining secondary. This task was only possible within the framework of the colony's laws, compelling the Jesuits to put the best face on their acquiescence by accepting that their work would serve to produce an Indian who could be used by others. They therefore became intermediaries, and only that, between the savages and civilization. Each time they attempted to divert them from their ultimate purpose, they provoked conflicts and had to give up. The example of the suppression in Paraguay a century later illustrates what happened a good many times in Brazil in forms that were less successful though just as violent.

Anchieta, the mission's scribe

This quick survey of the first twenty years of the evangelization of Brazil has led us to measure the distance which separated the missionaries from their interlocutors and those events which brought them closer together. The writings produced by the mission can only be understood through the desire to regulate this divide. Anchieta's work in itself represents all the variations of this project. By securing the transition between the oral culture of the New World and the learned tradition of the Old, it completed a complex series of operations which gave it its entire coherence. This brother possessed the two characteristics that were indispensable for the completion of this task. He was simultaneously a missionary who specialized in working specifically with the Indian villages, and one of the few who had mastered the rudiments of European scholarly culture.

José belonged to a great noble Spanish Basque family allied to the Loyola. His father, Juan, had had to leave his country in 1522 to seek his fortune as a colonist in the Canaries after obscure quarrels with the family of Ignatius Loyola. There, he married a Guanche woman from the local aristocracy. In 1534 José was born, the third of the couple's ten children. In 1550 he left for Coïmbra to study at this famous university as a Jesuit novice. He was quickly distinguished by his literary talents but above all by a religious fervour which led him to vow eternal chastity for love of the Virgin, and to subject himself to mortifications of the flesh and disciplines which threatened his very life. Ill with lung problems, he was sent to Brazil, from where the first letters had said that the climate was favourable for curing illnesses of this kind. But it is obvious that the young novice's exaggerated religious ecstasy must also have encouraged his superiors to send him to the country. His education amounted therefore to no more than two years of novitiate, certainly not conferring upon him the status of 'intellectual' willingly accorded him subsequently. Having arrived at Bahia on 13 July 1553, he was quickly sent to São Vicente, where Nóbrega had settled shortly before. The only one with any knowledge of Latin, he took charge of the teaching and very quickly learnt the rudiments of the Tupi language, the grammar and vocabulary of which he began to draw up in order to teach the other Jesuits. His knowledge of four languages (Tupi, Latin, Spanish, Portuguese) was to lead him to follow Nóbrega in his catechetical work, travelling throughout the region without

a break. In 1563 he took part with him in the negotiations of Ipéroig, remaining for two months as a hostage with the Tamoio. He became the friend of their chief, Cunhambeba. Similarly, he was one of the active members of the first colonization of São Sebastião (Rio de Janeiro) in 1565. At Bahia, he was ordained priest in the same year and in 1567 returned to Rio with the fleet of Mem de Sá, then went quickly to São Vicente to take up the post of superior of the college left vacant by Nóbrega, appointed to Rio. He was subsequently appointed rector of the college at Rio in 1573, made solemn profession of his four vows in 1577, and became the fifth provincial of Brazil in 1578, an office which he gave up in 1585. He died in 1597 at Reritiba in the captaincy of Espírito Santo. He was given the sobriquet, "the apostle of Brazil". His beatification was only pronounced in 1736, although the processes of beatification and canonization had been started in 1624. In fact, beneath the cloak of apostolic perfection, the character was controversial. First, it is clear that his personal feelings towards the Indians were very disturbed. It was only with great difficulty that he tolerated physical contact with them and always kept his distance. He was often extremely violent towards them and hotly defended the need for constraint and exemplary punishment in catechesis. We should not forget that he had Guanche blood himself. His religious fervour and his imprudent interventions had made him an effective auxiliary under the thumb of the wily and devious Nóbrega, but a poor provincial. Furthermore, over his canonization process hung the suspicion that he had himself, in a fit of rage, severed the neck of a French Huguenot condemned to death, so that the executioner did not need to perform his task. The facts are disputed, but it says much about the mixed feelings he inspired among his contemporaries. Subsequently, of course, Jesuit historiography has rewritten a story of virginity in his image, foregrounding his impressive literary oeuvre rather than his work of evangelization. In sum, Anchieta was a man of fervent religious intensity, an indefatigable missionary and a prolix writer versed in Latin rhetoric, but he was neither a thinker nor a politician. Effectively channelled by Nóbrega, he could give free rein to his characteristic traits, only he dissipated his efforts and his excesses disqualified him in the eyes of his contemporaries. His work as a writer – as the first Brazilian writer – remains today his most substantial claim to fame.

The works he left behind him can be gathered into three main groups. The first is those which he produced at the instigation of his provincial, Manuel da Nóbrega, in order to serve the policy pursued by the latter. It is a case here of freeing the space separating the mission itself from the European addressees on whom it depended. This oeuvre was thus composed with a view to publication, from the European perspective. We read there, above all, justification for the practices put into operation on the spot. All the letters composed between 1554 and 1570⁸ devote themselves to praising the work done by the Jesuits with the Indians at close quarters. In the same vein is the *De Rebus Gestis Mendi De Saa*,⁹ an inordinately long epic poem devoted to the glorification of the indispensable ally, Mem de Sá. This text, published at Coímbra in 1563, had a political function in justifying the action of the governor towards the colonists. But it was the Society of Jesus which remained the ultimate beneficiary, since the poem accumulated instances of divine intervention associated with Mem de Sá, promoted Catholic hero, notably when he attacked the French fort and the Huguenots occupying it. This propaganda work stays close to the events, the meaning of which the author explicates for the use of those not present. The use of Latin, as well as the epic form of the poem, are reminders of the connivance between those to whom it is addressed and the author. This work, the first Brother Anchieta wrote, displays

all the usual Jesuit characteristics. The dilution of the notion of the author is such that the *De Rebus Gestis*, published without the author's name, might seem to be the result of collaboration, so persistent is the impression of a composite work.¹⁰ The laborious and redundant lines sometimes make one think of imitations of Virgil, an author used by students learning Latin. For their part, the letters respect most of the constraints imposed by the Roman secretariat, to the extent of erasing specific features from the Brazilian landscape. The edifying anecdotes clump together character traits in the Manichaean representation of a fight between Good and Evil, a struggle common to all mission countries. This entirety draws its meaning, however, from the fact that, within an epistolary norm produced by the first Jesuits, it structures the conversion of a patent failure into success. Anchieta's letters, like those of his companions, arrange little bits of reality into a series in order to make them appear as the reality itself. A procession of little Indians singing *Salve regina* from village to village becomes there the radiant promise of a Christian Brazil. The Indian, most often a child, only appears in so far as he or she is in the process of transformation. This production constructs – 'edifies', in the proper sense of the term – the fiction of a Christian future, constituting the first articulation of the conversion of the country.

The second area of Anchieta's production directly concerns catechesis and evangelizing practices. The missionaries in Brazil began to take an interest in the native languages very early on. The quest for a language in common with the Indians had no ethnographic concern. From the opening of the overseas missions in 1542, the Order constantly resounded with the echoes of this debate. François Xavier and his successors in India had already advocated the systematic learning of native languages. In Brazil, from 1549 onwards, the mission, faced with an oral language, recruited temporary coadjutors whose sole qualification was command of Tupi. The other technique consisted of sending Portuguese children, orphans for whose maintenance the Society had assumed responsibility, into Indian villages so that they would soak up the rudiments of the language at a very early age and could later form an effective contingent of missionaries. But the rare successes with these methods could not conceal their failure. Both orphans and adults were too immersed in native culture to become good labourers in the Lord's vineyard. The endeavour to learn the language had therefore to be taken back within the Society. Tupi being an oral language, it had to be learnt by frequent contact with its speakers. Anchieta, residing permanently at Piratininga from 1554 to 1556, then at São Vicente until 1565, was eminently suited to this task. His first biographer, Pero Rodrigues, states:

He began to learn the language of the country and gave himself willingly to the task since, by means of the gift of languages which God had given him, he not only succeeded in understanding it and speaking it perfectly, but also compiled a grammar, in the very short space of six months, according to what he himself told one of the fathers many years ago.¹¹

The grammar thus circulated from 1555 onwards in the form of recopied manuscripts. Moreover, the same brother translated the catechism, an abridged vocabulary, a doctrine (a manual of catechism), a dialogue of matters concerning the faith and an 'instruction', that is, a series of questions and answers to aid confession and for extreme unction. This enormous work amounts to the sum of the texts destined for the Indians and those intended for use by the missionaries. It is clear that some of them must have circulated effectively. None has survived, however. Nevertheless, their organization is known indirectly through

sources printed in the following century, which follow the same principles. These were concordances presenting in the form of short phrases the questions and appropriate answers which made it possible to participate in the major sacraments. This type of linguistic transaction never seeks to create the conditions for communication. Rather, it is a case of giving evidence that the language of the other is being taken into consideration while at the same time imposing the anticipated responses upon them in return. The concrete result of such a practice is totally artificial communication. The linguistic object thus constituted is based on a reciprocal manipulation of the two interlocutors. The missionary does not speak Tupi but he pretends he does. The Indian has no need to believe what he says but he pretends to do so. The essential thing is for the village to remember the questions and answers. Anchieta, probably like a few others, occupied himself with this writing without any regard for publication. Tradition has bequeathed us the image of the brother who, cutting back on his hours of sleep, recopied manuals for his pupils and brothers by the light of a tiny flame. The grammar was only published in 1595, on the order of the Roman hierarchy, a year after the decretal on compulsory language-learning. It was a work of instruction which should have made it possible to train future missionaries in Brazil, by offering a tool to the novices from Portugal. In this text, Anchieta takes up the grammatical categories of the Latin language to gain access to Tupi. This intellectual horizon was impassable in the teaching environment, and only reinforced the idea of the creation of a writeable language, radically cut off from all practice. From the outset, the Tupi language that the Jesuits came to learn through their flock was that of the south of the country. Serafim Leite, the Jesuit historian of the Brazilian mission, makes Antonio Rodrigues, the soldier convert, Anchieta's main informant. This man had spent twenty years in the Chaco with the Guarani. The other intermediaries have left no trace. Now it was an old man, now a slave, without further details. But Pero Rodrigues, recounting the work in around 1558 on the language of the Maromomi,¹² a very important group who lived in the hinterland of São Vicente, furnishes a vital piece of information. The fathers began by translating the doctrine and the catechism into the new language; then they drew up a glossary, a 'vocabulary'; finally, they composed the grammar. This order is precisely that which we find for Tupi five years before. This means that they began by fixing short phonetic series, extended by the systematic notation of isolated terms, the whole receiving in a third phase a form of a kind, imported from Latin. In the course of the process, the perspective is inverted, with the first statement aimed at the natives, the second and third at the missionaries. The language of arrival has only a distant relationship with the point of departure. For all that, it does not become a third language utilizable by everybody. Jesuit documentation obviously insists on the success of such an enterprise. But numerous details reveal the failure of all direct communication. The clearest comes, perhaps, paradoxically, from the seventeenth-century chronicler, Simão de Vasconcelos, who gives an account of a day in a Jesuit village; a hagiographic text that ultimately says the reverse of what it attempts to substantiate. The reality of communication can be seen there, never going beyond the strict repetition of a few chunks of liturgy learnt by heart:

The manner of teaching that is employed with them, and which is still flourishing in the villages of Brazil (with little variation, for sure), is the following. To start the morning, when they hear the bell in the village which calls them to mass, all the children gather in the big chapel in the church, where, on their knees, in equal-sized choirs, they intone in a loud voice the praises of

Jesus and the Virgin. One of the choirs says: "Blessing and praise to the Most Holy Name of Jesus"; the other responds: "And to that of the Blessed Virgin Mary, His mother, for ever and ever. Amen." And then together: "*Gloria patri et filio, et spiritu sancto. Amen.*" And they continue until it is time for Mass. During the latter, they listen in silence. At the end, they wait for the religious whose responsibility they are, who teaches them in a loud voice the prayers of the Christian doctrine, and afterwards, in the same fashion, the mysteries of our holy faith in the form of dialogues, questions and responses, composed for this purpose in the Brazilian language, concerning the Holy Trinity, the creation of the world, the first man, the incarnation, the death and passion, the resurrection and other mysteries of the Son of God, the Last Judgement, limbo, purgatory, hell, the Catholic Church, etc. They prove so clever that they can give instruction, and do so effectively, in their own homes to their relatives who are usually rougher (taking into account the fact that they too, as well as their mothers, have a special instruction every saint's day, as well as Sundays, in the same church, with practices adapted for them). When the teaching has ended, the children begin once more in the choir: "Praise to the Most Holy Name of Jesus." The others reply: "And to that of the Most Holy Virgin Mary, His mother, for ever and ever. Amen." Afterwards they wait to be called, and they all go together to their school, to read, write or sing; others go to their musical instruments, depending on their individual talents. They end up being so good at singing and playing instruments, that they accompany the masses and their church processions just as well as the Portuguese. Seeing this, one bishop who was present could not hold back his tears, witnessing a talent that he could never have imagined in such subjects. They spend two hours in these schools, and two more in the afternoon, when the bell sounds once more, which they obey punctually.

When the *Ave Maria* for the night are heard, they regroup once more round the church door and from there line up in procession, behind a processional cross, and go in order through the streets singing the canticles of the saints loudly in their own language, until they come to a cross, which is their destination. Then they kneel down and commend their souls to purgatory in the following manner, in their own language: "Faithful Christians, friends of Jesus Christ, remember the souls who suffer in the fire of purgatory; help them with an Our Father and an *Ave Maria*, so that God may deliver them from the pains which they endure." And they all reply, "Amen". They say the Our Father and the *Ave Maria* aloud and return, still in procession, with songs to the fathers' gatehouse, where they finally intone and respond as follows: "Blessing and praise to the Most Holy Name of Jesus, etc." They wait to be dismissed, and when they are dismissed they return to their own homes.¹³

A century later, we can measure the path that has been trod. The writings of Anchieta and his contemporaries have produced nothing more than a liturgical coagulation of the Tupi language. Nevertheless, this ersatz phenomenon, thanks to publication but also to its repeated use, brought about the integration of the natives. The Jesuit created an object cut off from its possessors. Once standardized and filtered into liturgical life, this object could be infinitely repeated, in order to occupy as much space as possible, to saturate it in order to push the Tupi language further towards the exterior. What is true of the language is true of all practices. For the Jesuit, it was the strictly oral culture of the natives which had not permitted the preservation of Christ's message.¹⁴ The Indian had in fact only two of the three spiritual faculties, which authorized conversion according to the Augustinian concept, largely accepted by the first Jesuits. The Indian was given credit for intention and will, but memory was imperfect. Thus the first statements concerning the 'religion' of the natives, the memory of a flood, fear of evil spirits, or the myth of the famous "land without evil" among the Tupi-Guarani were so many signs, distorted memories of Paradise, the devil or the flood in Genesis. Rectification of this faculty was therefore essential,

implying massive recourse to techniques of repetition and imitation. It is immediately observable that direct communication lay quite outside the intention of the missionaries, who sought only a mode of transposition in their linguistic endeavour. A Jesuit making contact with new populations always followed the same strategy. He sought points of resemblance between elements of indigenous culture and those which came from Europe. Then he cut out the few gestures which he 'recognized' and inserted them into sequences which he himself was used to. This type of strategy, being insufficient in itself, could only prove effective if accompanied by a violent and systematic destruction of the native cultural markers. Anchieta summarized this necessity in two words, "temor e sujeição" (terror and subjection). The native populations gathered together in the villages entrusted to the Jesuit fathers were always fragments of tribes violently torn from their places of origin. It was only to any significant extent after the Indian wars waged with unspeakable brutality and savagery by the governor, Mem de Sá, between 1558 and 1562, that regroupings of Indians experienced a stability allowing catechesis. The work afterwards was relatively simple. The remnants of the tribes were mixed together in a single place, overturning the ties of kinship and cultural reference points of each. The Jesuits then managed marriage within the community by uniting young catechumens across tribal divisions. They made profound adjustments to the spatial organization of the village, by building a chapel at the centre of the village and by creating specialized locations, such as the school, forge or weaving shed. The total saturation of the circular space, focused on a single centre, as well as that of the time, patterned by the rhythm of songs and bells, created the space in which Christian prayers and actions took their meaning. Even if the natives had never been this 'virgin wax' as had been thought when they arrived, they were now in the process of becoming precisely that. Anchieta's linguistic labours therefore clarify the type of translation of Tupi culture which the Jesuits sought and effectively set in train.

There is a comparable movement when one tackles the other aspect of writing for catechesis, that of evangelizing theatre. This is situated in a broader perspective, integrating all the languages in order to encounter all types of audience. These works are characterized by their form, close to orality, the structuring of a spectacle using all forms of expression, ranging from song to pyrotechnics. The transposition is effected here thanks to emotion and dramatization. It is always a question of finding a road to the audience beyond words. But this drama, later than the linguistic works, takes account of the structuring of the new colonial society. Within each play, the will to integrate and forge the totality of the audiences is asserted. It is a form of urban drama, whose stage is the whole town, since it sets up its trestles in front of the church porch or on the central square.

Anchieta's first work, the most famous and the most frequently performed in Brazil, is revealingly entitled *Autoda da pregação universal*.¹⁵ It was played on Christmas night at São Paulo de Pratinha, at the instigation of Nóbrega, who had commissioned the performance. It lasted three hours and reduced the audience to tears.

The action of the play is divided into three phases, increased to five in later versions. Act I is a parable in Portuguese: a miller who was very proud of his Sunday suit was seduced by a woman who stole it from him. One actor told the story, while two others mimed the action. The act concludes with the miller's desperate laments. Act II is a dialogue in Tupi which presents two devils and an angel. The two devils have the names of two Tamoios chiefs, Guaixara and Aimbiré, well known for their hostility towards the Portuguese. They begin by boasting of having incited their people to indulge in every

vice. The angel arrives and, confronted with their violence, throws them down into hell. Act III did not appear in the first performance but is documented later. It takes up the theme of the previous act while adapting it for town-dwelling Portuguese. The latter file past in ten or twelve tableaux, representing a sin against public morality each time. The characters were historical, known to the audience, and accused themselves of their own faults, while reciting a decade of the rosary. The Virgin pardons them at the end of the act. Act IV is a dance of a dozen Indian children who sing twelve quintains (seven in Portuguese, three in Tupi and two in Spanish) to the accompaniment of flutes and maracas. Act V is the epilogue of the first, with the miller finding a jacket even finer than the first, thanks to his daughter (Maria) and his nephew (Jesus). The play ended with the enthusiastic shouts of the actors and the applause of the audience.

The Tupi core (Acts II and IV) is framed by the parable of Adam, the first sinner, stripped of his clothes because of a woman, then saved by the sacrifice of Jesus. The Portuguese episode is a possible addition, depending on the circumstances of the performance. The framing of the Tupi section, and its possible use in two parts, repeats the linguistic experience. It is a question of establishing a sequence, fixing it and giving them meaning in a different context (here, the Bible and salvation). All Anchieta's plays present the same structure for Act II, given over to Tupi, that in which the angel and the demons are portrayed. The Portuguese episode (Act III) makes possible the extension of the subject to the context of the colonial town, giving the place of reference (the Bible) as a universal, the colonizers being invited to the same penitence as the Indians. The fable of Acts I and V provides the key to what it is then only fitting that each type of spectator should root in their own context. It has all the attraction of a musical theme played in every key.

The expressive elements, song, dance and music, derive their entire importance from summarizing the essence of the transformation of the subject into pure emotion. The essential lies, in fact, in the tears or the horror which everybody should experience, understood as a necessary prelude to the evangelizing act. The scansion of one sole motif, sin, penitence and pardon, repeated in all the languages, nullifies them all in order to carve out an autonomous space common to all individuals. It is noteworthy that the structuring of the performance itself often functions in the same way, thanks to the work of the actors and artisans which it requires, often for several weeks. Thus, the first play by Anchieta appears to assign a very wide mediating role to performance, playing, like a foretaste of the baroque, on dissociation and illusion, in order to promote salvation, the only locus of real value. Reflections on the influences of the Portuguese dramatist Gil Vicente, or on the popular origins of the fable of the miller, cannot, alone, account for a work which is based on the negation of the text and its literary value, to retain only the evangelizing act and the profound emotion which it should arouse.

The famous *Auto da festa de São Lourenço* (1587) repeats the same subject and the same frame of mind with some variations. But the essence of Anchieta's work in theatre dates from his stay in Espírito Santo, during the last ten years of his life (1588–97). The circumstances then were not remotely similar. The mission had found some degree of stability and the texts were performed in front of Portuguese spectators. The natives who were present there were full members of the colonial society. Anchieta had then deepened his personal understanding of Tupi and handled it skilfully. Compositions exclusively in Tupi proliferated. His drama became more lyrical and forms part of the last piece that I shall examine.

The third and last area is, seemingly, the converse of the two that preceded it, composed of texts turning back on themselves, of redefining identity, as in the *De Beata Virgine*, as with all the last works. The poem to the Virgin Mary found its function in the reaffirmation of virtue, a shield against the attacks and threats which the proximity of the Indians caused to weigh heavily on the Jesuit. At the end of his life, the threat was no longer as pressing. Nevertheless, Anchieta composed a lyrical oeuvre, of songs and of poems. The texts in Portuguese and Spanish essentially go back to the learned lyric of the Iberian peninsula. The works in Tupi are in quite a different vein, like the famous 'Chanson du Tupinambá [Song of the Tupinambá]'.

*Eu me chamo Tupinambá,
Do Padre Grande mandado.
Todos os brancos daqui
me tem muy bem ensinado.
Meu parente antigamente
aqui morou e aqui esteve,
e tambem aqui o padre
lhe ensinou que havia Deus.
Veio por mar doutrinar-nos
que cremo num Deus
e os vicios se acabaram.
Eu peço e pedirei
à Virgem S. Maria
e ao menino formoso
que perdoe nos todos*

oração

*«Pelo meio do mar grande
Buscayo nosso coraçam,
vinde nosso amador,
porque vos mui bem sabei
que eu sou Pay Tupinambá»*

*Xe Tupinamba guaçu.
pai guaçu yru diba.
opacatu caraiba.
Xe mombaeté catu.
Xe auma erimbae.
teco ipyramo ceccou.
y xupé raubé Abaré.
ore tupá oquepa
ipupe orenheboebo.
tupá rerobia re tebo.
teco puero neobopa.
Ageirira yniye rebo.
S. Maria cupé.
O mi by porangueté.
tomoye recoab orebo.*

*Paraná guaçu reçape.
ajur nde repra pota.
ejori ore rançuba.
Teicatu nde cuapa
Xe ruaba Tupinamba¹⁶.*

This poem, very 'naïve' in inspiration, inaugurates the last phase of Anchieta's work upon the Tupi language, for which he took direct responsibility, no longer appealing to any kind of framework. The Jesuit had incorporated Tupi. He could say "I" without fear of being contaminated in so far as the deconstruction of the native interlocutor had been completed. This had taken place on the ground, since the Indian population had already been largely decimated, the Tupi more than others to the extent that they were the nearest. But the operation was also complete at the linguistic level, since the language was ultimately a totally expendable object, offered without resistance to evoke the past, the time of innocence and of purity ultimately rediscovered. It is therefore a question of a memorial object which authorizes Anchieta to say that he is 'Tupinambá'. Thus, the way was ineluctably prepared for what Brazilian romanticism was to do in the nineteenth century, in making from Tupi a topos, a cliché, a purely literary object.

An involuntary memory

José de Anchieta was a providential man. His work re-replaces the missionary's encounter with the Indian in the more general framework of the confrontation of an oral culture with

a written culture. The content and prop of the conversation that took place in the first hours of the conquest constituted a precise memory, not of the Indian but of the attitude the first missionaries adopted towards him. The Jesuits perceived the strict orality of the native culture as a deficiency and an appeal, and they very quickly made an empirical analysis of its weaknesses. Without any competition in the field of writing, the Jesuits made up and gave to the entire world the fiction of an infantile and immature people, inconstant and without memory. They suppressed anything that did not fit into this representation, whether they were incomprehensible elements or sometimes simply embarrassing. They were thus to resolve the paradox of only speaking about the Indian, who justified their presence, while concealing what they dreamed about.

Anchieta thus chronicled an erasure, that of the Indian as subject. But in so doing, he detailed minutely all the stages and made it possible for us to sense that on the border of his texts a shadow lingers without ever revealing itself. The pre-conquest Tupi language and with it the people who spoke it were in fact never really grasped by the missionaries, who only began their work from a material already altered by fifty years of Portuguese presence. The *lingua geral* was a decoy that served as a useful intermediary. The missionaries noted it and thus secured an essential transition by casting a veil over everything that they did not write down.

“Writing makes history”, stated Michel de Certeau in relation to Jean de Léry, but here history tells a lie. Anchieta’s writing operates, in fact, as an autonomous process, out of step with realities forever hidden. Cannibalism was systematically pursued and destroyed, another, entirely made up, succeeded it. The language which it left behind was an old skin which it relinquished to the conquerors.

It can thus be maintained that there was no conversion, no translation, but a straightforward transposition most often secured by force. The Indians endlessly repeated the words and gestures they had learnt without ever understanding their meaning. Forced to ‘parrot’ words, they were indeed the children of the “Land of Parrots”, the derisory name so often given to Brazil.

If, finally, the *De Beata Virgine* constituted the first line of a vital defence against reduction to savageness, to understand it aright the words traced in the sand, erased and then composed again from memory, showed the course of a much more effective approach. The Tupi language, and with it the entire Indian world, was at the mercy of a vanquishing memory. Well aware that wind and sea had smoothed away the original words, he had now to do no more than modestly attempt to read those which had been written in their place.

Jean-Claude Laborie

Paris

(translated from the French by Juliet Vale)

Notes

1. This scene is definitely not documented in the primary sources for the episode, that is, essentially the letters of Brother Anchieta. No mention of the poem is to be found in the first biographer, Quiricio Caxa, the Jesuit father who gathered the first biographical elements together on Anchieta’s death in 1597. But from Pero Rodrigues’s version (1606–9) onwards, the task of composition on the beach and that of memory

made their appearance. It was the Jesuit chronicler Simão Vasconcelos who was to ennoble the scene by describing the process of *parto da memoria*, the labour of memory. The motif was to give rise to an abundant iconography thereafter.

2. José de Anchieta (1595), *Arte de grammatica da lingoa mais usada na costa do Brasil* (Coimbra: Antonio da Mariz).
3. There is a recent edition of Anchieta's complete works: (1970), *Obras completas*, 13 vols. 1: *De rebus gestis*; 2: *Poemas eucarísticos*; 3: *Teatro*; 4: *Poemas*; 5–I: *Lírica portuguesa e tupi*; 5–II: *Lírica espanhola*; 6: *Cartas*; 7: *Sermões*; 8: *Dialogo da fé*; 9: *Textos históricos*; 10–I–II: *Doutrina cristã*; 11: *Arte de gramática* (São Paulo: Loyola).
4. In a letter dated from the month of August 1549, known by the title, 'Information concerning the lands of Brazil', the Superior, Manuel da Nóbrega, described the customs of the Tupinikins and the Tupinambás, their cannibalistic rites which took place just a few hundred metres away from the colony. *Monumenta Brasiliae* (1956) compiled by Father Serafim Leite, pp. 145–54.
5. There are only a few Portuguese accounts of the voyage and the thin correspondence of the captain-financiers. It is reproduced in its entirety in Carlos Dias Malheiro (ed.) (1921–4), *Historia da colonização portuguesa no Brasil* (Porto).
6. The *regimento*, a sort of register of commands given by the king to his governor-general, Tomé de Sousa, is a long document divided into forty-seven paragraphs, which specifies the objectives and the means of putting them into practice in the territory. It is published in Malheiro, *Historia da colonização*, pp. 345–50.
7. This fort was the French settlement built in 1555 by the Knight of Malta, Nicolas de Villegagnon, in the bay of Guanabara. It was what was called 'Antarctic France'. In March 1560 the troops of Mem de Sá drove out the hundred-odd French who were still there. A thousand or so Tamoios, allies of the French, against a comparable contingent of Tupinikins on the Portuguese side, supplied the manpower in a bitter combat which put an end to the dream of French Brazil.
8. There are some twenty letters, reports of what has been done and letters of edification, which are entirely impersonal. They are published in the *Monumenta Brasiliae* series, op. cit.
9. *De Rebus Gestis Mendi de Saa Praesidis in Brasilia* (Coimbra: apud Johannem Alvarum typographum regium, 1563). This text is accessible in the Loyola edition of 1970 already cited (above, note 3).
10. These observations have already been essentially made by Frank Lestringant (1988), 'Au rendez-vous brésilien, ou l'agonie de la France Anarctique, d'après le *De Rebus Gestis Mendi de Saa* (1563)', in *Portugal, Brésil, France: histoire et culture* (conference proceedings) (Paris: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation), pp. 25–40.
11. *Primeiros biografias de José de Anchieta*, edited and annotated by Hélio Abranches Viotti, S.J. (São Paulo: Loyola, 1998). This edition reproduces the two first biographical texts, that of Quirício Caxa (1597) and that of Pero Rodrigues (1607). The original of the quotation translated is at p. 64.
12. *Primeiras biografias*, op. cit., p. 66.
13. Simão de Vasconcelos (1663), *Chronica de Companhia de Jesus*, third edition (Petropolis: Vozes, 1977), Book II, pp. 14–5 (author's translation).
14. Lying behind this opinion is the certainty that all peoples received the revelation of the message of Christ from the apostles, who divided the world on the death of Jesus. It was St Thomas who received what was to become America as his share. The Jesuits in Brazil recognized traces of this first evangelization by making an amalgam of 'Zomé', one of the great civilizing heroes of Tupi mythology, and 'Tomé' ('Thomas', in Portuguese). Every year, the Jesuits organized a procession to footprints imprinted in a rock in Porto Seguro, tracks believed to be those left by Tomé when he ascended to heaven.
15. *Obras completas*, op. cit., volume III. This volume reproduces the texts rediscovered in Anchieta's manuscript notebooks.
16. This text is the third part of a poem reproduced by Batista Caetano (1882), in the appendix to his *Curso de literatura brasileira*, second edition (Melo Moraes Filho). The text was translated from the Tupi by Father João da Cunha.