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BRAZILIAN ANTHROPOPHAGY: MYTH AND LITERATURE

*"Museus! estátuas! catedrais!
O Brasil só tem canibais!"*

Carlos Drummond de Andrade

1. The fact that Brazil, land of parrots and coffee, is also, by antonomasia, that of cannibals, is a commonplace that we find in the writings of foreigners and natives from the early years of the

Translated by Jeanne Ferguson

conquest up until our era of advanced civilization, at the level of anthropological reality (we should like to say anthropophagic) and at that of metaphor. As though, forgetful of the general accusation of anthropophagy launched by the first explorers against the various indigenous peoples of America, beginning with the Caribs/Cannibals of Columbus,¹ the colonizing and evangelizing Old World wanted to transfer to Vera Cruz and its inhabitants the exclusive rights to these “savage customs of a people without justice and law” that the first Western ethnographer, Herodotus, had attributed, in the Eurasia of his time, to the peoples of the Far North, at the other side of the extensive desert lying beyond the land of the Scythians—those who were called the Androphagi.² And as if, of all the peoples and communities accused, in various latitudes and epochs of history, of having anthropophagic practices,³ the Brazilians were the only ones to not just defend themselves against the infamous accusation but to flaunt it as a symbol of their autonomy and originality when confronted with the menace of religious and cultural colonization.

How and when did this “appropriation” by the Brazilians of the anthropophagic myth occur? How and when did the Brazilian, born of the encounter of the Indio, the White and the Black in the

¹ According to the interpretation attributed to Columbus (the authentic and interpolated texts, reconstructed or falsified, of the latter express, as we know, all sorts of nationalism). The onomastic pair *caribes-canibales* indicated the Caribs of the Lesser Antilles as “bad savages” man-eaters, opposed to the “good savages”, of the Greater Antilles, the rediscovered Eden of the *Almirante* of the Catholic kings in his first contact with the lands of the New World. See on this subject Manuel Alvar, “Arahuacos y carybes,” preface to Columbus’s *Diario del Descubrimiento*, 2 vols., Gran Canaria, Ediciones del Cabildo Insular, 1976, I, pp. 47-51.

² Herodotus, *Histories*, IV, 106.

³ Geographical maps of prehistoric and “primitive” cannibalism are found in practically all classical and modern books on the subject. Among the modern studies (for the most part, scientifically meager generic works but endowed with up-to-date bibliography) see Christian Röthlingshöfer-Spiel, *Menschen essen Menschen*, Munich 1972; Christian Spiel, *Uomo mangia uomo*, Milan, Mondadori, 1974; Marvin Harris, *Cannibals and Kings. The Origins of Cultures*, New York 1977. Among popularized works should also be noted *The Man-Eating Myth, Anthropology and Anthropophagy* by William E. Arens, New York, Oxford University Press 1979.

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land of the *pau brasil*,⁴ finally decide to take upon himself the cannibal heritage that came exclusively from the Indio, whether he was Caeté or Tupinamba? Why and how, accused of anthropophagy, did the Brazilian decide to accept himself as a modern hypostasis, reincarnation of a multiracial Brazil representing, diachronically, the Indio of before the conquest and, synchronically, the original Indio remaining primitive.

Certainly, the chronicles are full of man-eaters and prehistoric and contemporary cannibals have been studied on different levels.⁵ When it is a question of primitives, that is, present-day anthropophagi, opposed but in a way related to the anthropophagi of yesterday, from the time man was anthropophagous⁶ it is the specialists in physical and cultural anthropology who have the final word—the ethnologists, historians of religions, psychologists and psychoanalysts. In the study of documents and in their approach to the peoples they describe, these specialists often depend on ancient literary and paraliterary testimony—tales of the navigators and explorers of the past, for example—that can help them decypher through analogy some situations that are more or less modern.

⁴ Expressly quoting Nansen (in *Northern Mists*, II, pp. 223-230) which brings up the possibility that the Irish *Hy Breasail* has a rapport with the denomination of Brazil, the author of *Hobbit* and *Lord of the Rings* remarks "It is a tendency [that of rationalization] which seems to have come into fashion as soon as the great voyages began to show the world as too small to contain men and elves at the same time. In fact, as soon as the magic land of *Hy Breasail* to the west was reduced to simply Brazil, the land of the red wood" (J.R.R. Tolkien, *Tree and Leaf*, London, 1955). Nevertheless, for centuries the Italian words *berci*, *verzino* as the French word *brésil* served to designate the wood used as a colorant that was imported from the Orient until the end of the 15th century and which, found in the New World by the first discoverers later became one of the major attractions of the American territory. One should note, furthermore, that the name of an island *Brazil* (*Braci*, *brazi*) occurs in many maps of the Atlantic Ocean starting from the 14th century.

⁵ Because of the type of discourse we intend to make we will here give preference to the psychoanalytical level with the classic *Totem and Taboo* by Sigmund Freud.

⁶ Put into doubt by the anthropologists, the belief according to which we descend from anthropophagi subsists at the poetic level of the myth. An ancient phenomenon, situated in a diachronic series and in a perspective confident in the values of civilization and human progress, cannibalism only survives in the "savage" behavior of today's men who still have the "ancient claws, the ancient teeth and in their hearts the ancient ferocity of the cannibals" (Giovanni Pascoli, *L'Era Nuova*, 1899).

This is why the correct reading, not only philological, of the old documents takes on such importance and why the philologist must guide specialists in other disciplines who want information but have only secondhand or third-hand documents or dubious testimony, especially from the point of view of the text, at their disposal. The question of the exactness of the text is primordial. In the specific sector that concerns us here, that of the custom of anthropophagy as a constant element⁷ in the culture of Brazilian Indians, we note for example that researchers in ethnology or anthropology are almost exclusively interested in the historical content of the documents they are presented with, texts or simple testimony, and that even the most serious among them are indifferent to their form, the language in which they are written, the style, in short, their real significance. When Volhard quotes Pigafetta he uses the edition of Forster and Sprengel⁸ without the least concern for the original of the Ambrosian document or its probable French version, the basis for the princeps edition of 1522. Likewise, when Arens and perhaps even his detractors,⁹ studied the testimony of Hans Staden using the English translation of 1929¹⁰ it was the documentary value of this famous book that interested them. They paid no attention to its literary dimension nor were they concerned to know by whom and how the famous illustrations of the book were made, that make it the incontestable bible of cannibalism in literature, a scandal in all times and in all countries.

This is where the second aspect of the problem comes in, that of the so-called objectivity of the man of science. However objective the researcher may be, however conscientious he may be to hold to the “facts”, it is none the less true that he brings a determined ideology, a certain world view that, if it does not condition his

⁷ See Ewald Volhard, *Kannibalismus*, Stuttgart, Strecker and Schröder, 1939.

⁸ Anton Pigafetta, *Erste Reise um die Welt durch Ferdinand Magellan*, *Beiträge zur Völker- und Länderkunde*, Leipzig, Ed. Forster and Spengel, IV, 1844.

⁹ Arens' work, quoted in Note 3, because of its provocative thesis (cannibalism is a myth of the anthropologists) and somewhat hasty way of its demonstration has been subjected to severe criticism, that for example of P.G. Rivière in *Man*, 15 March 1980, pp. 203-205 and that of R.E. Downs in *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 7, No. 4, Nov. 1980, pp. 785-786.

¹⁰ *Hans Staden: The True Story of His Captivity, 1557*, (Trans. Malcolm Letts), New York, McBride, 1929.

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scientific affirmations, at least guides the choice of his field of investigation. We, the philologists, are also responsible for this world view, we who prepare the texts or, if you like, serve as guides—at the critical level as well as the semiological level—to the correct interpretation of the texts, the basis of all later scientific construction.

2. In this regard, we may mention a contemporary document. Italian newspapers report that on Monday, August 17, 1981 in the high-risk quarter of a Sardinian prison, four inmates knifed to death another prisoner who was considered unanimously as the absolute “boss” of the nightclubs in Milan. Subsequently they cut up and ate some parts of the body. In the commentaries on the event reporters spoke of a cannibal rite, an “improvised *danse macabre*,” the “end of the power of the boss,” of “pagan fury.”¹¹

An account of this sort, which perhaps for anthropologists of the future would be a document on Italian cannibalism, can be read on different levels. A first reading, purely psychoanalytical, may allow us to see in the prisoners’ actions the signs of an over-powering “love” for the boss and the survival of anthropophagical rites intended to transfer the charisma of a man to his destroyers, or rather, since it could be considered as an endo- and not exocannibalism, to their children. But a second reading is also possible, more specifically semiological and concentrated on the *fabula* and its actors such as presented to us by the narrator. The journalist who, and this should be noted, was not present at the event, uses expressions like “cannibal rites” and “pagan fury” to describe it. These terms indicate the presence of literary reminiscences in the reconstruction he made of the story.

So we must ask what part, in the ritual execution as it is described to us, belongs to the imitation of primitive behavior by these modern-day executioners and what part on the contrary belongs to the reconstruction and typological recognition of their actions by the journalist... Such an experience, so close to us in time, can serve at all levels for the interpretation of the anthropophagical accounts of our earlier reporters.

¹¹ Leonardo Coen, *La Repubblica*, Rome, August 19, 1981, pp. 1 and 5.

3. The attitude of the European navigator-explorer toward the New World he had discovered (the land and its inhabitants) is two-fold. The Other, the naked Indian who came to meet him armed only with his innocence (it does not matter if the meeting was with Columbus or with Pero Vaz de Caminha: the *cliché* of the discovery is always the same) is the “good savage,”¹² and the surrounding countryside is paradise regained.¹³ Or the Other, the one who did not participate in the true religion, the pagan cannibal, is the “bad savage, the Devil himself” who, after having belonged to the terrestrial paradise later became the main cause for the installation of hell on earth.

These two theses have remote origins, well before the moment in which they were observed on the American continent,¹⁴ but the formulation made of them at the time of the Renaissance gives them a consecration that will later condition all judgment on the subject. Two well-known texts contributed more than anything else—perhaps even more than the famous and controversial letter from Vespucci to Pier Soderini—to the literary crystallization of the theme of the Brazilian cannibal. At the same time and precisely because of their literary nature they contributed to the transformation of this theme into myth and gave it a positive value, even if it was only in a metaphorical register and in a derisory and anti-European spirit.

The first of these texts (1572-73) is that which Montaigne, in Chapter XXXV of the first book of his *Essais*¹⁵ devoted to cannibals: a singular text in which the theme of the bad savage, the

¹² L. Stegagno Picchio, *Binary Opposition In Literature: The Example of Brazil*, *Diogenes*, 99, 1977, pp. 3-25.

¹³ Concerning Brazil, the work of Sergio Buarque de Holanda, *Visão do Paraíso. Os motivos edênicos no descobrimento e colonização do Brasil* is a classic. See the second edition, São Paulo, Companhia Editora Nacional, 1977 (“Brasiliana”, no. 333). On Edenic motifs applied to the American continent on the whole see Charles L. Sanford, *The Quest for Paradise. European and American Moral Imagination*, Urbana, Illinois, 1961.

¹⁴ The book of S. Buarque de Holanda (*op. cit.* I-IV) contains curious quotations and pertinent extracts from Latin and Italian texts of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance.

¹⁵ Montaigne, *Essais*, annotated by Albert Thibaudet, Paris, Gallimard, *Bibl. de la Pléiade*, Vol. 14, in the 1950 edition, ch. XXXI, “Des Cannibales,” pp. 239-253.

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anthropophagous devil announced by the title, is tempered and inverted into that of the good savage, natural man to whom is opposed the negative civilized man, presented as a degenerate being, fallen from his first nobility of *vir a diis recens*. This passage has been so often quoted and commented on that a reexamination, even in the particular context of Brazilian cannibalism, would seem superfluous. However, it is precisely this new light that allows us to uncover the new subtleties and heretofore unsuspected ironies.

When he was 29 years of age and in Rouen with the royal army that had come to take the city from the Huguenots, Montaigne had the opportunity of seeing the Indians who had been brought there from Brazil to satisfy the curiosity of the Europeans. Furthermore, on a different occasion he had at his side

“a man who had lived ten or twelve years in that other world discovered in our century, in the place where Villegaignon landed and that he names *France Antartique*.”¹⁶

It is this very man who informed Montaigne about the nature of this “unlimited land”: he did not know whether it was the Atlantis of Plato or the fertile island discovered beyond the Pillars of Hercules by the Carthaginians according to Aristotle. The informant could be trusted, because he

“was a simple and rough man, a condition proper to give a true testimony: refined gentlemen are much more curious and see more, but they comment and to validate their interpretation they cannot help somewhat altering history. They never give you things as they really are, they slant them and mask them according to their views. And to credit their judgment and attract you to it they lengthen and amplify. Either a very faithful man or one who is so simple that he does not espouse false inventions is necessary. My

¹⁶ Translated from *op. cit.*, p. 239. In 1550 on the occasion of the solemn entry into Rouen of Henry II, the inhabitants of the city had organized grandiose spectacles. The most remarkable, that took place in a field on the banks of the Seine transformed into a Brazilian jungle, succeeded with fifty authentic Brazilian Indians and 250 inhabitants of Rouen disguised and painted as “savages” from Brazil to recreate in an extraordinary manner the Edenic atmosphere. Cf. F. Dennis, *Une fête*

man was like that. Furthermore he showed me various sailors and merchants that he had known during this voyage. So I am content with this information without asking what the mapmakers say about it.”¹⁷

It is precisely from such conversations with a “simple and rough” witness that Montaigne drew the convictions that make his chapter *Des cannibales* a classic of Edenic literature today. The title itself of the chapter, which seems to indicate a judgmental attitude of the white European toward the Other, the extra-European, is misleading. A closer examination shows that the perfect irony of the text is built on oppositions: barbarians versus non-barbarians and the exchange of values between the two elements of the pair. It will not escape those who are familiar with Iberian literature that in those same years, due to the broadening of the horizons beyond the Pillars of Hercules, the European lost his hegemony and the Mediterranean its place as the center of the universe as Camões, a pilgrim from the Orient commenting on the *Nigra sed formosa* proposes to explain to his barbarian slave *con quem andava de amores na India* the same semantic correction:

*“Pretidão de Amor
Tão doce a figura
Que a neve lhe jura
Que trocara a cor.
Leda mansidão
Que o siso acompanha
Bem parece estranha
Mas barbara não.”*¹⁸

brésilienne célébrée à Rouen en 1550, Paris, 1850; J.-M. Massa, “Le Monde Luso-Brésilien dans la joyeuse entrée de Rouen” in J. Jacquot and E. Komogsen (eds.) *Les Fêtes de la renaissance*, Vol. III, Paris 1975, pp. 105-116; William C. Sturtevant, “First Visual Images of Native America” in Fredi Chiappelli (ed.) *First Images of America: The Impact of the New World on the Old*, Berkeley, Calif., 1976.

¹⁷ Montaigne, *Essais*, *op. cit.*, p. 242 (transl.).

¹⁸ I. Luis de Camões, “*Aquela cativa*”.

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Montaigne's irony is still more subtle: led by his discourse to oppose the barbarous American cannibal to the civilized European, heir of Rome, he begins by recalling as an example that for Greeks such as Philip of Macedonia or Pyrrhus of Epirus the barbarians were the Romans:

“When Pyrrhus went to Italy, after he had seen the order of the army the Romans sent against him: I do not know, he said, what barbarians these are (since the Greeks thus called all foreign nations), but the disposition of this army that I see is not at all barbarous.”¹⁹

Times change. And today, Montaigne concludes, after having heard the tales about the Brazilian Indians furnished him by his informant:

“To return to my argument, I find that there is nothing barbarous or savage in this nation... if not that each man calls barbarous what is not of his own custom.”²⁰

The Indian, the natural man still close to his “original *naïveté*,” inhabitant of a “very pleasant and temperate country” where it is rare to find a sick person or even a trembling and toothless old man; the Indian who lives in a community and does not know commerce or letters, numbers and magistrates, political superiority, wealth or poverty, contracts, successions, divisions, labor—unless it is a pleasure—clothes, agriculture, metals; who refuses lies, treachery, avarice, envy, dissimulation, the Indian cannot even be condemned for his cannibalism:

“After having treated their prisoners well for a long time and with all the commodities they could provide, the chief calls a great assembly of his acquaintances. He ties a rope to one of the prisoner's arms, by the end of which he holds him, a few steps away, and gives the other arm to his best friend to be held in the same way, and in the presence of the assembly they both kill him with a sword. That done, they roast and eat him in common,

¹⁹ *Op. cit.*, p. 239 (transl.).

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 242-243 (transl.).

sending their share to those of their friends who were absent. It is not, as some think, for nourishment, as it was with the Scythians. It is to represent an extreme vengeance.”²¹

No break in the calm voice of the philosopher while recounting this idyllic scene of a regained Eden, since if later the so-called savages redoubled their savagery and ferocity in the celebrations of their victorious agapes, it was because they had been pushed to it by the real “barbarians,” the Portuguese invaders, accustomed to inflict much more terrible deaths and tortures on their enemies. In the impartiality of Montaigne’s discourse we sense the appearance of the old resentment nourished by the French occupants of Antarctic France toward the Portuguese, the first explorers and conquerors of the Land of the *Pau brasil*, even though the conclusions (and the reversal of the meaning of the term barbarian) ended by indiscriminately involving all Europeans:

“We can thus call them barbarians with regard to the laws of reason but not with regard to us, who surpass them in all sorts of barbarian behavior.”²²

4. When we compare the account given by Montaigne’s informant (an account that is known to us through the philosopher’s words and the Platonizing interpretation he gives) with testimony of the same period concerning the customs (essentially cannibalistic) of the Brazilian Indians, we are inclined to think that this witness is truly worthy of belief, to the degree in which his account coincides with the latter (considered, for the same reason and for reciprocity, just as credible). The agreement of the two accounts is especially felt in the disposition of the sequences: capture of the prisoner, his benevolent treatment, convocation of the assembly, the way the prisoner was attached, his execution, his being cooked and served in the agapes that followed, the “significance” of the ceremony. However, when we know how few Europeans had, like Hans Staden, the opportunity to live with the cannibals and return home afterward to recount their adventures, we may ask if what the

²¹ *Ibid.* p. 247 (transl.).

²² *Ibid.* p. 248 (transl.).

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witnesses tell us, each quite honestly, would not be a simple reconstruction of something they heard, transformed into a myth, with its own organized and structurally autonomous *fabula*.

The history of the *Wahrhaftige Historia* by Staden is well known. The book appeared in Marburg early in March, 1557, and its success with the public was such that a second edition appeared in September of the same year, while two other editions, probably unauthorized, appeared, still in 1557, in Frankfurt.²³

Many fortunate editorial “inventions” undoubtedly contributed to the singular luck in Germanic countries²⁴ of a text apparently without specific, or at least intentional, literary qualities but which in reality took on a poetic dimension because of its succinct and direct nature, its ability to renew the meaning of everyday words by staying away from the mannerism then present in the literary traditions of the time, including the German tradition coming from the austere Lutheran reform.

The first element in the success of the book no doubt came from its external appearance: the mere statement of its title “*A True History and Description of a Country of Savages, Naked, Ferocious, Man-eating*” evokes the marvellous “savage,” peopled with childeating ogres who had always been one of the *leitmotifs* of the collective German soul (we need only recall the cruel stories—nightmares of our childhood—of the astute Tom Thumb preparing endocannibal meals by tricking the ogre into eating his little ogresses, or Hansel and Gretel, forced into fattening within their cages to serve as a meal to the nearsighted witch.)²⁵

It seems that another determinant element in the fortunes of Staden’s *Büchlein* was the famous series of engravings it contained. Done by an unknown artist, no doubt from direct indications by

²³ Bibl. ref. to note 9.

²⁴ The first French edition in the collection of Ternaux Compans (Sabin no. 90059) *Voyages, relations et mémoires pour servir à l’histoire de la découverte de l’Amérique* seems to be that of Paris, 1837.

²⁵ Since anthropophagy is a general fact, anthropophagic mythology exists in all peoples. Greek mythology, full of light, also has its dark sides, with Chronos eating his own children. But we are not alluding to this when we speak of the collective unconsciousness of peoples. The texts quoted here are in fact only a first detailed approach to a theme to which we will return.

Staden, they depict with a naive realism, but one that is not without elegance, a whole series of scenes: a circle of women, the “good savages” endowed with an Edenic beauty, who, surrounded by their children, prepare the drink that will accompany the feast, or a group of cannibals, men and women, executing a prisoner tied with a rope (*mussurana*) at the moment of being eviscerated. The Tupinambas are shown eating the prisoner’s head from a cauldron around which young anthropophagi lick their fingers among the bones lying on the ground, while on the right Staden (with his initials over his head and his private parts modestly hidden under a fig leaf) joins his hands in an anguished but useless prayer.

To the degree in which it participates in the dual nature of a document, the text accompanying the engravings is no less suggestive. The first part appears as testimony of one who experienced it. Staden relates his horrifying adventure in the first person with the humility of a man who places an ex-voto in a church in gratitude for mercy received. The second part is a scientific treatise on the model of those of Cardim or Gabriel de Sousa²⁶ in which Staden gives, in the third person, a “short and true account of the life and customs of the Tupinamba” of whom he was the prisoner. Undoubtedly the merit of this repartition of the subjects he treats (the second entirely serving the illustrations for which the text is a commentary) may be attributed to Johannes Dryander, the “*genant Eychmann*” whose excessive words in the introduction have so often been deplored. The cover of the book with a drawing of an Indian eating a human foot²⁷ while he relaxes in a hammock above a brasier where three magnificent legs are roasting, indicates from the start what the subject will be. But the text is so adroitly composed that one wonders up to the end, with

²⁶ Fernão Cardim, *Tratados da terra e gente do Brasil*, Rio de Janeiro, J. Leiter Cia, 1925; Gabriel Soares de Sousa, *Tratado Descritivo do Brasil em 1587*, “*Brasiliana*”, Vol. 117, São Paulo, Editora Nacional, Univ. São Paulo 1971. For a comparison of the different chroniclers see Antônio Alberto de Andrade, *O Auto Notarial de Valentim Fernandes (1503) e o seu significado como fonte histórica*, in *Arquivos do Centro cultural Português*, Paris, Gulbenkian, V, 1972, pp. 521-535.

²⁷ Testimony coming from other cultural areas of American Indians confirm that the feet were the preferred morsels of the anthropophagic meal. See Philippe Aubert de Gaspé, *Les Anciens canadiens* (1833) An integral text conforming to the 1864 edition, Montreal, French-Canadian Library, 1975.

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growing anguish, who will be eaten and who will not. The story is punctuated with the description of the important moments of the feast of human flesh:

“Then he was cut up and his flesh divided among all present, as is the custom. They ate all of him except for the head and entrails, for which they felt a repugnance since he had been sick. Later I walked among the huts. In one they were roasting the feet, in another the hands, in a third pieces of the trunk.”

And by this “scientific” description of the anthropophagic banquet of the second part:

“The women immediately seized the body and put it on the fire where they skinned it and made it all white by plugging the anus with a piece of wood so that nothing could come out. Once the skin was removed, a man cut off the legs above the knee and detached the arms from the body. The four women approached, seized the four pieces and ran around the huts shouting with joy. Then the villagers separated the back and the buttocks from the upper part of the body, and all was distributed among the villagers. But the women kept the entrails: they boiled them and with the broth obtained a soup called *mingau* which they drank with the children. As for the entrails, they were eaten, as was the flesh around the cranium. The children ate the brains and the tongue and everything else they could find.”²⁸

Undeniable literary qualities are found in this calm description of practices similar in all points to those that “civilized” men apply to their animals: expert handling in cutting up the meat, details of the preparation of a broth for children and the ill by the mother of the family. Of course, the illustrations of the naive artist, which come immediately before the text, are there to reinforce the macabre nature of the scene. How much does the artist owe to Staden’s text and how much does Staden owe to the artist, in our present interpretation?

5. One of the most interesting paintings in the Museu de Arte

²⁸ Hans Staden, *op. cit.*.

Antiga in Lisbon (*Janelas Verdes*) is by an unknown artist but one thought to belong to the Portuguese school (first half of the 16th century). The canvas is a traditional representation of Hell. At its center is a huge cauldron licked by flames in which five people, laic and religious, are cooking. All around are devils tormenting other sinners, particularly a woman who oddly resembles the images of the anthropophagous Indian women that illustrate Staden's book. They are using more refined techniques, eviscerating their victims, filling their mouths with a burning liquid and using hot irons, chains and pincers. One of the singularities of the painting, pictorially very clever (we immediately think of Bosch, even though the oniric fantasy is less and the realism more naive and crude) is that at least two of the devils represented are Indians and in all probability—if we judge by the guardian devil, nude and ornamented with animal skins on his head and arms, tormenting the young girl in the foreground—Tupinambas of Brazil. The clothed Indian who in a red armchair dominates the scene from above, indicating his rank, is more difficult to identify. Perhaps from Mexico, he wears a feather headdress.

The feathered Indian had been introduced a few years earlier, around 1505, again by a Portuguese artist and in another traditional scene—that of the *Adoration of the Magi* in the Viseu cathedral—where, with the traits of the good savage for the first time in European painting, he represents the Moor in the group of the Magi.²⁹ In a short time we have gone from the good savage of Caminha to the bad savage of Hans Staden, André Thevet and Jean de Léry;³⁰ from the natural man to Macunaíma.³¹ While in Caribbean folklore and religion this same Macunaíma represented the supreme god and the creative spirit, he was quickly trans-

²⁹ This painting, formerly in the cathedral of Viseu, is today in the museum of Grão Vasco in the same city. Several reproductions were made on the occasion of its exposition in the Grand Palais, Paris, Sept. 17, 1976-Jan. 3, 1977. See the catalogue by Hugh Honour, *L'Amérique vue par l'Europe*, p. 10, Paris, Secrétariat d'Etat à la culture, Ed. des Musées nationaux, 1976.

³⁰ André Thevet, *Les singularitez de la France Antartique, autrement nommée Amérique*, Paris, 1557; Jean de Léry, *Histoire d'un voyage fait en la terre de Brésil autrement dite Amérique*, La Rochelle 1578.

³¹ The first name is *Macunáima*. Mário de Andrade transformed it into *Macunaíma* by changing the place of the accent.

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formed into an anti-god, the god of the Other, that is, into a devil in the Jesuit and Franciscan interpretation. And that is when he began his itinerary as anti-hero that led him to the threshold of modernism and made him the symbol of anti-Europe through the mediation of his reinventor Mario de Andrade. In between was a Dutch parenthesis, of which we will mention only the famous painting by A. Ekhour that in 1641 was the admiration and amusement of Europe: the cannibal Tapuya is represented plodding heavily through an Eden-like ambience of vines and greenery, naked, in sandals, holding in his right hand the devoured forearm and hand of his enemy. In the knapsack over his shoulder is the foot of this enemy, a choice piece probably reserved for his female companion. But here we are far from the realistic chronicle and in full cannibalistic amusement, because the cannibal Indian has, unequivocally, the features of a sturdy Dutchman.

6. It may be just this literary dimension of the testimony on Brazilian cannibals³² that gives us the first key to the interpretation of the modernist anthropophagic movement in Brazil that in 1928 unveiled a new and primordial land, untouched by any European influence where the formidable laughter of personalities like Mário de Andrade, Alcântara Machado and Oswald de Andrade suddenly resounded. It is the charm of the tales and exegeses transmitted by thinkers of the stature of Montaigne or of the interest in first-hand witnesses like Hans Staden. It is the halo of innocence and primordality that surrounds these Indians in our eyes, inhabitants of a primitive Eden whose purity could only be preserved if the white conqueror were driven out. Perhaps it is also the ironic dimension with which for us—"the evil," "the savage"—take on today those interpretations that the Renaissance has left us of these newly-discovered worlds, these rough illustrations of Indians roasting and boiling enemies, or of infernos peopled by Indian devils.³³ It is perhaps all of this that pushed Brazilian modernists

³² We will complete the summary and selective bibliography given up to this point by Alfred Métraux, *A religião dos tupinambás*, second ed. São Paulo, Comp. Ed. Nacional. Ed. Univ. S. Paulo, 1979.

³³ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Le Cru et le Cuit*, Mythologiques 1, Paris, 1964. According to the ingenious distinction made by the author between the boiled meat

to metaphorically re-enter the shining skin of their cannibal ancestors. Why do the Brazilians who refuse Europe and the white conqueror eat their Portuguese enemies?

Freud taught us, through Frazer, that the cannibalism of the primitives finds its own justification in the criterion of belonging: “Assimilating in ourselves through ingestion the parts of a person, we also take possession of his qualities.”³⁴ He even suggested, with the identification of the father with the totemic animal consumed collectively by a community of members of the same clan, that in the totemic meal, perhaps the “first festival of humanity”,³⁵ we perceive the repetition and commemoration of this first murder of the father which marked the end of the system of the horde, a despotically paternalistic system:

“One day the banished brothers got together, killed the father and devoured him, thus putting an end to the paternal horde. United, they dared to realize what would have been impossible for a single individual. That they devoured the assassinated father is obvious, since they were savage cannibals. The progenitor, violent, was undoubtedly the envied and feared model of each member of the fraternal tribe. Thus by devouring the father they realized their identification with him, each receiving some of his strength.”³⁶

When and how did the Brazilians put an end to the “horde” that the Portuguese mother country was for them? The assumption of the Indian as a characteristic element of Brazilian-ness while everything concurred, on the contrary, to make the black man the basic component of an extremely complex racial reality had two phases.

In the first one, in the 19th century, the romantic search on the part of every European and American nation for its own national specificity, Brazil—the one of the cry of Ipiranga (“independence or death”) and of the constitutional empire—saw itself in the

offered to the nearest of kin and the roasted meat offered to foreign guests, these devilish Indians had the custom of boiling their victims in the practices of endocannibalism and roasting them in those of exocannibalism.

³⁴ Sigmund Freud, *Totem et Tabou*.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*

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Indio-good savage of the 16th century, the unique autochthonous element of its racial triad with regard to the immigrated white and the imported black. It was the Crown itself that set the example. In 1825 in a first instance of what we may call acceptance and assumption the Emperor Pedro I had himself portrayed as a European monarch holding a free Brazil to his breast, incarnated by a plumed Indian woman. Just a few years later, in the second phase which was already that of identification, the Emperor Pedro II, inspired by the example of the Mexican Guatimozin, was immortalized by Debret, the painter of the Napoleonic exploits, with the features of a resurrected Guatimozin dressed in a yellow cloak with toucan feathers, symbol of the historical continuity between empire and indigenous caciques. In the same process of “digestion” (to use a particularly apt anthropophagic metaphor) of national history the nobles of the court, defying Europe and the arrogance of the Portuguese conquerors, took Indian names of exotic and provocative musicality: the Baron of Itamaracá, the Marquis of Sapucaí, the Marquis of Maricá, the Viscount of Araguaia, the Baron of Paranapicaba.

But in this reappropriation or reincarnation of the Indian in the more general process of autonomous rediscovery of Brazil, there is not a place for the anthropophagous Indian, such as he was characterized in the beginning, in the 16th century. The romantic Brazilian Indian—the Tamoio of Gonçalves de Magalhães, like the Timbira or Tupí of Gonçalves Dias or the Guarany of Alencar—remained a conventional personage, a symbol imported from European romantic nationalism and modeled on the *cliché* of the proud Natchez of Chateaubriand. And Alencar, author of *Guarany* (1857) which today is recognized as the masterpiece of the Indianist literature of Brazil, will himself declare that Cooper and his Mohican would have seemed “realistic” compared with his own extremely stylized characters.³⁷

After the adventure of the first discoverers and its reinterpretation in the 19th century into nationalist terms, we must wait for the “third discovery” and the new anti-European modernist

³⁷ José de Alencar, in L. Stegagno Picchio, *La letteratura brasiliana*, Florence, Milan, Sansoni-Accademia, 1972, pp. 184-185.

Indianism of the 20th century it brought with it for the conventional good savage to be superimposed and opposed to the bad savage of today, still more conventional since it is ironic and provocative. Thus the rapprochement of the two parts of the discourse, apparently so different or at least belonging to two distinct registers: the anthropological discourse on one hand, the purely literary (or metaphoric) discourse on the other, should not seem incongruous. As we have tried to point out, there is above all a literary bond between real cannibalism interpreted by the Renaissance and the metaphorical cannibalism of 20th-century modernism. If in addition we arrive at the profound significance of the problem, we will see that it is eminently symbolic and that the symbol (the ingestion of the Other in order to acquire his virtues by transforming the taboo into totem or for vengeance and affirmation of independence) is always the same. Without taking into account that we would understand nothing of modernist Brazilian anthropology, its symbols and rites, if we did not know the historical precedents of the 16th century.

7. Still today, almost fifty years later, modernist anthropophagy is, to Brazilian critics, one of the most original *avant-garde* movements, one of the most radical and revolutionary of our century. In a work with a significant title, *On the Anthropophagic Reason: Europe Under the Sign of Devouring*, which appeared in 1981, Haroldo de Campos, poet and critic of the concretist *avant-garde*, retraces the road taken by the movement and puts the relationship “National/Universal” in a new way, within the Latin-American and especially Brazilian culture:

“The Oswaldian “Anthropophagy” of the twenties is a reflection on the fact of critically devouring the universal cultural heritage, elaborated not in the submissive and conciliatory perspective of the “good savage” but in the disenchanting one of the anthropophagous “bad savage,” devourer of the whites. It does not bring a submission (catechism) but a transculturation or, better, a “transposition of values,” a critical view of history as negative function (in the Nietzschean sense) as susceptible to appropriation as to expropriation, of hierarchization as deconstruction. All the past that is “other” to us must be denied. In other words, devoured and eaten. With this explanatory singularity: the cannibal was a

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polemist (from the Greek *polémos*: struggle, combat) but also an “anthologist.” He devoured the enemies he considered courageous to absorb the proteins and marrow that would reinforce and renew his own natural forces.”³⁸

It could not be better put to show the tie between the first Brazilian cannibalism and the second, more radical.

Certainly, the modernist anthropophagous movement which in 1928 in the columns of the *Revista de Antropofagia* raised, like a veritable banner, the Indian Caeté, devourer of the Portuguese bishop Sardinha, and launched the slogan “the Middle Ages continue.” Proud of its anti-European nationalism, it wanted to cancel out Columbus and Cabral, the caravel and the Cross, but has without a doubt itself a European origin.

In Europe, Jarry had made the cannibal fashionable in his 1902 article entitled “Anthropophagy is not dead” and in his *Almanagues du Père Ubu* as well as through Picabia in the *Manifeste cannibale Dada* (1920).³⁹ But the resemblance to the Brazilian anthropophagic movement ended there. It is probably true that the Brazilians (especially Oswald de Andrade) borrowed the idea to clothe their movement of modern revolt in the garb of anthropophagy from Picabia. The 1922 movement in fact began to show signs of senility and it was felt that only ferocity, intransigence and violence could bring vitality to art and literature. Picabia’s cannibal was only metaphorical in the tormented taste of the nihilistic manifesto of Marinetti: “You are all accused. To death, to death, to death.”⁴⁰

Imported (we would like to say “restored”) to Brazil, the word and the thing again took on their historical and realistic meaning. If to the French ear “cannibal” only meant “criminal, wild beast, executioner” or “outlaw,” for the avant-gardists of the 19th century in Brazil the word immediately evoked the smell of roast meat, grilled in the Tupinamba fashion and the souvenir of the memorable words pronounced by poor Hans Staden during his

³⁸ Haroldo de Campos “Da razão antropofágica: a Europa sob o signo da devoração” in *Colóquio/Letras*, no. 62, July 1981, Lisbon, pp. 10-25.

³⁹ For the bibliography, see Francis Picabia. *Catalogue de l'exposition des Galeries nationales du Grand Palais*, Jan. 23, March 1976.

⁴⁰ *Id.* p. 91.

incarceration. In German these words provoked terror; in Portuguese, in the flippant but faithful modern version, they provoked laughter. Thus the first issue of the *Revista de Antropofagia* came out with the inscription *Lá vem a nossa comida pulando* at the bottom of the page (Here is our meal arriving, hopping) which was what the Tupinamba said to the terrified prisoner obliged to hop because his feet were tied together.

We will not dwell on the description of the various and sometimes unequal contents of the *Revista* that has had (and deserved) an examination in depth. We will simply recall that between its first “dentition” running from May 1928 to February 1929 (ten monthly issues of eight pages each) and its second “dentition” (a full-page weekly in the *Diário de São Paulo*, 16 pages in all from March 17 to August 1, 1929) the “scandalous prionical” hosted among other texts the introduction, or better, the “*hors d’oeuvre*” of Mario de Andrade’s *Macunaima*. For the first time and radically, the problem of the difference between the languages of Brazil and Portugal was posed in anthropophagic terms: ingest the European language in order to appropriate it but at the same time rid oneself of it. And it also hosted the ingenious *Anthropophage Manifesto* of Oswald, containing revealing proposals of the type “We have never been catechized. What we have produced is the Carnival.” Or, “We have already had Communism. We have already had surrealist language. The Golden Age. *Catiti. Catiti. Imara Notiá Notiá Imara Jpejú.*” Anthropophagy lifts the veil on a dawning and primitive world whose image Tarsila gives us in his books, an image enriched by his own European experience and in which the cannibal Abaporu, future emblem of the movement, makes his appearance. Anthropophagy leads to Raul Bopp and the immensity of the Amazon jungle, to his Yperungaua and his Cobra Norato in which the entire universe had its origin, beginning with the Cobra, great eater of men: the new universe of the Amazonian forest of Brazil. Like all revolutionary movements, anthropophagy sets up its calendar and signs its own texts with expressions such as *Ano 375 da deglutição do bispo Sardinha* (the year 375 after Bishop Sardinha was eaten).⁴¹

⁴¹ See the re-edition of *Revista de Antropofagia*, 1st and 2nd Dentições

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8. At the present stage of research, the conclusions can only be provisory. Studies of much more depth and detail are needed to put exact material and critical analysis for its interpretation at the disposal of the ethnologist or anthropologist specialized in anthropophagy. Here it suffices to state the problem and show that the modern and ironic fortune of the theme of anthropophagy with Brazilian intellectuals issuing from the *Semana de Arte Moderna* of 1922 bore a trace of its preceding literary treatment in the classical texts of national anthropophagy. The question is not to know if the cannibal exists. The cannibal—whether diachronic or synchronic, endocannibal, ritual cannibal or cannibal for survival—is, in all probability, an anthropological reality. In his preface to Volhard's work, the Italian translator wrote:

“This phenomenon that the conscience of so-called civilized people has always and without exception considered as an essentially sporadic deviation, though widespread, as an aberration of the human psyche, fallen to a degree of brutality of which the animal psyche itself mainly refuses to give an example, appears on the contrary in the irrefutable light of carefully prepared and evaluated documents as a phenomenon of a practically universal geographic extent, at least as far as the enormous intertropical band of the globe is concerned. And moreover as a phenomenon that most often responds not to superstitions but to profound vital experiences, behind which we often glimpse dramas and desires, the struggle of life against death, acts of abnegation and heroism whose depth is difficult to measure.

Even brutal cannibalism, that shows a terrible insensitivity of man toward man—not inferior to that in general shown by humans toward animals—lets us see (otherwise it would be senseless) an underlying conception of life experience that significantly corresponds to the universal insensitivity of nature toward individual lives, that nature which, unceasingly destroying ephemeral forms constantly draws life from death.⁴²

1928-1929. Introduction by Augusto de Campos, São Paulo, Ed. Abril, Metal Leve, 1975.

⁴² Giulio Cogni, preface to Ewald Volhard, It. trans. pp. 11-12.

As we suggested at the beginning, in a purely philological register, and without going into the heart of the problem, we could discuss this “irrefutable light thrown by carefully compared and evaluated documents” even on the part of a specialist as serious as Volhard. We could also follow Arens in the exciting itinerary of his controversial book whose conclusions are diametrically opposed to those given above:

“Although the theoretical possibility of anthropophagy as custom cannot be discarded, the available proofs do not allow us to retain with certainty that this practice was ever a dominant cultural characteristic. It is more reasonable to conclude that the idea of the cannibal nature of the Others is a myth, in the sense that it has an independent existence, with no ties to historical reality, and that it contains and conveys cultural messages meaningful for those who consider it valid. On the concrete level of experience, that means that the idea precedes any proof brought to its support and that in some cases it is a matter of a position maintained in spite of evidence to the contrary. This is why I believe that the most fascinating problem is that of the rapport between anthropophagy and anthropology seen as conceptions of inter-dependent worlds... Without anthropophagi anthropologists would find themselves in exactly the same situation as the inquisitors of the Middle Ages who, after having quickly exhausted the reserves of mortal heretics, had to evoke supernaturals for fear that their activity and knowledge would become superfluous.”⁴³

These are serious and obviously provocative accusations. It is understandable that they have given rise to angry reactions from the specialists.

Without taking up the quarrel, we may say in spite of everything that at least from the anthropological point of view Aren’s book is too impassioned and hasty. As his critic Rivière said, it would take twenty years and not two to demonstrate the non-existence of cannibalism as a “characteristic habit” (Arens himself never dreamed of denying other forms of anthropophagy.) But the idea of this book, that is, that opinion (in this sense a preconception) precedes any proof in its favor (an argument that as we know turns

⁴³ W.E. Arens, *The Man-Eating Myth*, *op. cit.*.

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against the author) could be the subject of discussion at all levels. We have given a rapid demonstration of it. However, we have wanted to add to this affirmation, as corollary, in the form of a question: “How many texts adopted up until now by the ethnologist and anthropologist as support for their opinions (and it does not matter which side they are on) should not also and especially, or exclusively, be studied from the literary standpoint?”

Our inquiry on the myth of the Brazilian cannibal was based on a specific question: when, how and why did today’s Brazilian, even metaphorically and ironically, decide to accept himself (literarily) as the modern hypostasis of reincarnation of the anthropophagous Indian of the early days of the conquest? The answer arising from our study may be this: in the first exegeses of the *Homo Brasilicus* made by foreign observers and thus assumed to be impartial (we mention only the names and literary stylizations chosen for this study, Montaigne and Hans Staden) we find the opposition Brazilian versus Portuguese, that is, the inhabitant of America versus the Iberian conqueror, an opposition that will produce the process of autonomization of Brazil as a colony with regard to the mother country.

According to Montaigne or Hans Staden, “Brazilian” naturally means “autochthonous, Indian.” But in the imperialism that was developing in the New Indies and saw on one hand the Portuguese as explorers-conquerors of Brazil, on the other hand the French as adventurers-merchants, the most naked and most anthropophagous of these Indians, the Tupinamba, would be allied with the French against the Portuguese. And the sage Montaigne, for whom the only sin of the Brazilian cannibals is that they are premature *sans-culottes* (“What, they do not wear breeches?”);⁴⁴ Montaigne, who predicts the certain ruin of the good anthropophagous savage caused by his contact with the white man (“Three of them, not knowing how much the cost will be to their happiness and tranquillity when they learn the corruption from over there and from which will derive their ruin, which I assume was already advanced, miserable to have let themselves be duped by the

⁴⁴ Montaigne, *Essais*, p. 253 (transl.).

novelty...”).⁴⁵ Montaigne therefore, as a Frenchman, cannot resist imputing to the Portuguese the introduction of the most ferocious cruelty into the innocent universe of the cannibals:

“... having seen that the Portuguese used another kind of death for their adversaries when they captured them, which was to bury them up to the waist, shoot many times at the exposed part of the body and then hang them: they thought that these people from another world like those who had spread knowledge of many vices among their neighbors and who were much greater than they were in all kinds of evil did not take this sort of vengeance without a reason and that it must be sharper than theirs, began to leave their former ways to adopt this one.”⁴⁶

As for Staden, his entire book is permeated with a cry: “Do not eat me! I am not Portuguese!” There again the Portuguese conqueror is presented by the Tupinamba cannibals with whom the German soldier installs a rapport of terrorized solidarity, like the enemy, opposed to the French who were the allies, as they were allied with the Tamoio who saw in them the yellow parrot, the *ajurujuba* opposed to the evil *peró*, symbol of the Portuguese.

When the Brazilian, son of the New World, decides to oppose the Portuguese, inhabitant of Europe and conqueror of Brazil, that is, when the colonist, even of Portuguese origin, feels that he is one with the land where he lives and against those who oppress politically and socially from far away, it is logical that the old oppositions reappear and that the Brazilian identifies himself with the cannibal Indian, enemy of the Portuguese. The movement had its two key moments in the Romantic phase of the good-Indio and in the Modernism of the bad-Indio. It is a movement that only today can consider itself ended with the return of the caravels and the “colonization”, symbolic but nonetheless profound, of Portugal by Brazil, at the level of television and the mass media in general but especially at the level of language. Perhaps the cannibal of today is none other than the Portuguese renewing his old European blood with the Brazilian experience.

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⁴⁵ *Ibid.* p. 252 (transl.).

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* p. 247 (transl.).