

**NA FESTA DE SÃO LOURENÇO (ANCHIETA, 1587):
A PHILOLOGICAL-HISTORIOGRAPHIC LECTURE**

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this lecture is to discuss the text *Na Festa de São Lourenço*, a dramatic text authored by the missionary and humanist S. José de Anchieta (1534–1597) in sixteenth-century Portuguese America. The *Na Festa de São Lourenço* was performed in Niterói, within the indigenous community of São Lourenço, and stands as one of the rare surviving examples of colonial literature for which we possess complete textual documentation. During this lecture, I will delve into the textual sources of the work, which have been meticulously organized and translated by the philologist Armando Cardoso. Our analysis will engage with the Historiography of Linguistics theory, considering that the work serves as a secondary source that offers insights into the linguistic perspectives of its author, Anchieta.

Keywords:

Linguistic thought. Renaissance humanism. Sixteenth-century theatre.

RESUMO

O objetivo da palestra é debater o auto *Na Festa de São Lourenço*, texto dramático escrita pelo missionário e humanista S. José de Anchieta (1534–1597), na América portuguesa do século XVI. O auto *Na Festa de São Lourenço* foi encenado em Niterói, na comunidade indígena de São Lourenço, e é um dos raros exemplos de literatura colonial dos quais temos testemunho textual completo. Em-abordaremos em nossa palestra as fontes textuais da obra, para as quais o filólogo Armando Cardoso organizou e traduziu o texto. Nossa análise dialogará com a teoria da Historiografia da Linguística, considerando que a obra registra, como fonte secundária, o pensamento linguístico de Anchieta, seu autor.

Palavras-chave:

Humanismo renascentista. pensamento linguístico Teatro do século XVI.

1. Introduction

In the realm of Philology, any researcher delving into the essence of classical culture and literature in Brazil would inevitably consider the works of José de Anchieta (1534–1597) as integral to the canon of Brazilian classics in the early modernity (Kaltner, 2020a). This Jesuit missionary stands as the author of the most significant body of literary works from the 16th century in Portuguese America, the former colony of

the Kingdom of Portugal, which transformed into Brazil after gaining independence in 1822.

While interpretations of Anchieta's work have spanned centuries since the 16th century, the most substantial philological research on his works emerged in the 20th century, led by the Luso-Brazilian philologist Armando Cardoso (1906–2002). Cardoso meticulously curated and edited the complete works of this missionary, collectively known as the *Monumenta Anchieta*. This compilation remains a cornerstone of philological study in Brazil.

This article aims to delve into one of Anchieta's works, as edited by Armando Cardoso in the *Monumenta Anchieta*, which represents a significant piece of sixteenth-century Portuguese American drama. Specifically, I will explore the play *Na Festa de São Lourenço*, presumed to have been written and performed between 1583 and 1587 (Anchieta, 1977).

2. *The Jesuit Theater in Portuguese America*

Theater was one of the manifestations of the poetics of classical antiquity, and as such, it found its place in the humanistic education of the Renaissance. This, in turn, influenced the educational and missionary practices of the Jesuits, including figures like Anchieta. In this context, we can comprehend how theater was utilized in 16th century Portuguese America as an instrument of catechesis. The Jesuits were not the first missionaries to use theater as an instrument of catechesis in 16th century Portuguese America; this tradition was initiated by Franciscan missionaries (Kaltner, 2020a).

In European humanistic education, the principal Latin author employed for teaching Latin theater was *Publius Terentius Afer*, from the second century BC. His theatrical plays were utilized for activities involving the active use of the Latin language, particularly for training in the art of conducting dialogues in Latin within the colleges and universities of the 15th and 16th centuries. Over time, alongside the enactment of passages from Terence's works, more intricate exercises emerged, such as emulating the author's works. Ultimately, these exercises evolved into the creation of dramatic texts with a didactic purpose. In the case of missionary endeavors, they served a catechetical purpose.

For the Jesuits in Portuguese America, theater served the cause of evangelization, namely, the dissemination of the Christian faith among indigenous peoples, European colonists, and enslaved Africans. Theatrical representations facilitated the communication of doctrine and simplified the teaching of theological matters. Jesuit theater served as a means to dramatize biblical passages and Christian traditions, making legends and customs more comprehensible, while also recounting the life stories of significant figures in Christian doctrine (Anchieta, 1977).

Missionary education was grounded in religious instruction within the local communities of Portuguese America. Between 1549 and around 1580, Jesuit missionaries bore nearly sole responsibility for education in Brazil. Theater remained a constant presence in the schools and colleges administered by these missionaries. Its purposes included teaching the Portuguese language, conveying moral and cultural values rooted in the European Judeo-Christian and Greco-Latin traditions, and promoting socialization within the context of community life, according to Western standards of the era. Theater formed an integral part of the social life of 16th-century Portuguese America.

3. *Conversion and Acculturation in 16th Century Portuguese America*

Jesuit theater in 16th century Portuguese America had a primary focus on catechesis within the context of the Council of Trent and the colonialist ideology of expansion and territorial conquest. Despite the Renaissance humanism's proposition of fostering dialogue between peoples and cultures, the perception of the 16th century still reflected an asymmetrical form of humanism in which the relationships between colonizers and the colonized were pronounced. It was not a comprehensive and integral humanism in fact.

In Jesuit theater, there exists a notable record of profound criticism directed at indigenous religious practices and the indigenous culture of local populations. The European worldview, from an ethnocentric perspective, clashed with indigenous traditions that were deemed incompatible with the newly introduced Christian customs. This theme is a recurring motif in Anchieta's theater, for instance, and it was a fundamental part of the ideological rhetoric within his performance context. It's worth noting that this ideological rhetoric may not have yielded practical success in 16th century Portuguese American society, but it underpinned the

colonial society as an ideal for assimilating indigenous communities into the Portuguese American colonial project.

Furthermore, Jesuit theater served as a form of entertainment in colonial communities in 16th century Portuguese America. It took the shape of popular festivities open to the general public, often associated with public celebrations, which aimed to unite people and popularize religious conversion. The visual and musical language of Jesuit theater, as well as the communal nature of the performances that brought together indigenous peoples and European settlers, with a diverse cast of characters, made it a captivating spectacle of the 16th century. Additionally, the participation of children, the use of musical instruments, and choral singing in Portuguese, Tupi, and Spanish added to the emotional appeal for the audience attending these plays.

Lastly, the social function of Jesuit theater could also be linked to the assimilation of European thought through the transmission of cultural traditions. As the overseas colonies remained connected to their metropolis, theatrical practices became a means of preserving elements of European court life in Portuguese America, albeit with necessary adjustments. Literary traditions, music, and the performing arts, in general, played a role in establishing a European cultural identity even in Portuguese America. Overall, theater played a significant role in the missionary and educational activities of the Jesuits in colonial Brazil, enabling them to reach, educate, and influence local populations in a variety of ways.

4. *Anchieta Theater and the Ecology of Language Contact*

An interpretive dimension worth exploring concerning Anchieta's theater revolves around its staging in 16th century Portuguese America. Anchieta's dramatic works were performed in open-air settings, including indigenous villages and Jesuit missions. In this regard, the environment in which his theater took place is a significant factor that must be considered.

There is, indeed, an inherent connection between the 16th century environment of Portuguese America and Anchieta's works. This connection can be explored through ecolinguistic theory, which serves as a tool for interpreting the linguistic ecosystem in which Anchieta's work evolved. In the specific case of the theatrical text *Na Festa de São Lourenço*, I find the linguistic ecosystem that emerged from the former village of São Lourenço dos Índios in the 16th century, which is now the city of Niterói.

The concept of language contact ecology, stemming from ecolinguistic theory, can be applied to the interpretation of Anchieta's play, especially since it is written in three languages: Portuguese, Castilian, and 16th century Tupi. These three languages were integral to the dynamics of linguistic contact in 16th century Portuguese America during the period of the Iberian Union, coinciding with the time of the play.

The play *Na Festa de São Lourenço* centers around the concluding moments of the life and actions of São Lourenço, a Christian saint from the 3rd century renowned for his devotion and martyrdom. São Lourenço held significant importance in the conversion of indigenous peoples. In addition to being a Catholic military saint who would aptly represent the founding wars of Rio de Janeiro, São Lourenço was martyred on a grill over embers, which held significant symbolic value in relation to the rituals of Tupinambá cannibalism.

5. *The first act of the play Na Festa de São Lourenço (1587)*

The first act of the play “Na Festa de São Lourenço” is written in Portuguese and features a song that reenacts the martyrdom of the saint, who was burned alive on a scorching grill during the period of Christian persecution by the Roman emperors. The poem, written in the first person, is a song and is divided into four-line stanzas (Anchieta, 1977).

The setting for the first act of the play is the courtyard of the church in the indigenous village of São Lourenço, in an open-air environment. The first stanza is an invocation of Jesus by Saint Lawrence as he is dying on the red-hot grill's flames. The saint cries out for salvation and remembers that Jesus died for his sins, according to Christian doctrine. Finally, there is a metaphor likening the fire that consumes him to the fire of Christ's love.

Por Jesus, meu salvador,
Que morre por meus pecados,
Nestas brasas morro assado
Com fogo do meu amor (Anchieta, 1977).

(By Jesus, my savior,
Who died for my sins,
Upon these embers, I am roasted
With the fire of my love).

In the second stanza, the suffering of Saint Lawrence evokes the suffering of Christ on the cross. This analogy allows the saint to unite

with Jesus in suffering, but also in love. These are the final thoughts of Saint Lawrence before his martyrdom, in devotion to his faith.

Bom Jesus, quando te vejo
Na cruz, por mim flagelado,
Eu por ti vivo e queimado
Mil vezes morrer desejo (Anchieta, 1977)

(Dear Jesus, when I behold you
On the cross, wounded for my sake,
I live and burn for you
A thousand times, I long to partake)

The third stanza presents more information regarding Christian doctrine, invoking the symbolic concept of the blood of Christ, which represents his passion, death, and resurrection. This blood is believed, according to the Catholic faith, to wash away the sins of humanity. São Lourenço burns in the flame of the embers, feeling the love of Christ stronger than the fire that torments him.

Pois teu sangue redentor
Lavou minha culpa humana,
Arda eu pois nesta chama
Com fogo do teu amor (Anchieta, 1977).

(Of your redeeming blood,
Which cleanses my human guilt.
I burn within this flame
With the fervor of your love).

The fourth stanza presents a symbolic image in which the love of Christ is depicted as the fire that burns Saint Lawrence, rather than the embers. This transfiguration serves as a metaphor for the Christian faith, illustrating how it conquers death through belief in Christ. The death of São Lourenço becomes an epiphany. This also appears to be the moment in the play when São Lourenço breathes his last and passes away.

O fogo do forte amor,
Ah, meu Deus!, com que me amas
Mais me consome que as chamas
E brasas, com seu calor (Anchieta, 1977).

(The blaze of this potent love,
Oh, my God! How it consumes me,
More than flames and embers,
With its fervent heat).

The last and fifth stanza already presents São Lourenço transformed into a saint, a metaphysical being engulfed in the flames of Christ's love.

It is an epiphanic presence in Anchieta's play, accompanied by hymns sung by the audience. The redefined fire no longer symbolizes the martyrdom's pyre but instead embodies divine love.

Pois teu amor, pelo meu
Tais prodígios consumou,
Que eu, nas brasas onde estou,
Morro de amor pelo teu.

(For your love, and for mine,
Such wondrous deeds are done,
That I, amid these embers,
Die of love for you, the One).

6. Conclusion

In this preliminary study, it is evident that Anchieta's theatrical text served as an instrument of catechesis while also serving as a literary record of cultural practices in 16th century Portuguese America. The ecological dimension is linked to Anchieta's plays, given their outdoor staging and the natural environment of Portuguese America in the 16th century.

The relationship between language and the environment in Anchieta's work is a topic that demands further discussion and should be the focal point of future research. The ecological dimension is crucial for analyzing historical texts concerning 16th century Portuguese America, considering that societies of that era were intricately intertwined with ecological niches, much like an ecosystem.

From the analysis of the play's passage, it becomes apparent that it possesses significant symbolic and metaphorical value, albeit constrained by the theme of Christian indoctrination, which was the predominant poetic theme in the context of 16th century Portuguese America. It represents a poetic work of sacred nature, reminiscent of other works by Anchieta. The stylistic elements employed by the missionary reflect his humanistic education, a hallmark of the training he received at the Colégio das Artes in Coimbra. It is likely that he had access to the works of another playwright, the Portuguese humanist Gil Vicente, during his time there.

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