

**“Diz-me o que comes e eu te direi quem és”:
Food, Cannibalism and Identity in João
Ubaldo Ribeiro’s *Viva o Povo Brasileiro***

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I think there is more barbarity in eating a man alive than in eating him dead; and in tearing by tortures and the rack a body still full of feeling, in roasting a man bit by bit, ... than in roasting and eating him after he is dead.

(Montaigne 155)

Cultural heritage helps to determine and identify people’s values, behaviour, and subsequently their life-style. In a real sense, then, culture helps man to select what he eats.

(Barer-Stein viii)

A brief look at João Ubaldo Ribeiro’s *Viva o Povo Brasileiro* clearly shows that food is a major component: from the slave gatherings to Amleto Ferreira’s exquisite English meals, the novel signals the importance of food whose meaning fluctuate between a basic daily necessity, to an elaborated demonstration of social status and power. In *Viva o Povo Brasileiro* there is a cornucopia of food and food related activities. Undeniably, what the characters eat is not an arbitrary act, or better yet, not driven by pure hunger. Some find in food a sense of belonging, of solidarity, while others seek their differences by establishing certain food preferences, and still others, exhibit their socio-economic power by lavish meals. The caboco Capiroba and Perilo Ambrósio share not only the same soul, but also a peculiar relationship with food. This essay will explore, using semiotics as the framework for analysis, how food plays a defining factor in the portrayal of both characters. Food will, at times, isolate them and enlarge the gap between them and an increasing hostile world. However, food will be a constant throughout their lives, a feature of their being and a reflection of their souls. In fact, food is the medium that represents them, that ultimately allows us to identify them; it embodies their struggles, their failed, and/or successful relationships, and their desires. Nevertheless, and despite the fact that caboco Capiroba and Perilo Ambrósio are linked in this matter, food represents opposite issues: while Capiroba builds a society around the civilized rites of commensality, Am-

brósio destroys it. In due course, we begin to notice that these characters do not correspond to our expectations or those of other characters.

Food is never just about satisfying a primordial necessity, but rather as Roland Barthes has aptly pointed out, a system of communication (21). Food is one of the many codes employed by humans to form what Marcel Danesi has recently explained through semiotics as culture which he defines "as a container of the meaning-making strategies and form of behaviour that people employ to carry out their daily routines" (*Of Cigarettes* 24). Every human interaction is in fact, an exchange of signs; therefore, all mundane activities, such as meals, signify and are imbedded with meaning that ultimately tells us something about that particular culture. People have appropriated food as a central sign and transformed it into an elaborate cultural expression, namely cuisine that "refers to what we eat, how we eat it, and what it tells us about the makers and eaters" (Danesi, *Sign* 164). Accordingly, food preferences change from culture to culture, Danesi points out that often there is a mythical or religious reason behind such preferences.¹ Therefore, "our expression 'to develop' a taste for some strange food [can reveal] how closely tied edibility is to cultural perception...we perceive gustemic differences in cuisine as fundamental differences in world view and lifestyle—as differences between us and them" (*Sign* 168).

Food is culture, it links us. It has the power to unite individuals who share the same set of beliefs and who will as a consequence also share the same food habits; for instance due to the principles of equality promoted by democratic societies, people tend to eat together (Brown, *Fictional Meals* 6). Peter Scholliers adds that food is also closely related to the notion of identity:

Food crosses the border between the 'outside' and the 'inside', and this 'principle of incorporation' touches upon the very nature of a person. This is why eating and drinking matter greatly to all people, and why...migrants...retain some food habits when language or other cultural expressions tend to be forgotten. (8)

Comparably, Claude Grignon defines commensality as "a gathering aimed to accomplish in a collective way some material tasks and symbolic obligations linked to the satisfaction of a biological individual need" (24). This type of gathering centred around food can have positive and negative aspects; for instance, segregative commensality has the ability to strengthen a certain group and to exclude others as well.² Either way, it is ultimately a part of one's identity that resides in the "feeling of fitting in" by making social distinctions that might include relatives, neighbours, colleagues, etc., but also define the oppositions between edible and inedible (Grignon 31).

Caboco Capiroba and Perilo Ambrósio deal with issues of identity and feelings of belonging throughout the novel. In spite of the fact that they share the same soul, they are separated by centuries and by social status. It would be expected that they would act according to their prescribed social roles. Capiroba as an obedient villager, thankful for all the priests' efforts to "educate" them, and Perilo Ambrósio as the baron of Pirapuama, noble and cultured. Nevertheless, they are neither accepted by their peers, nor seem to be able to adhere to their specific social behaviours. Food then, presents itself as a sign of their unique isolations, Capiroba's cannibalism and Ambrósio's violence reveal their deviance, their exclusion, and eventually, their demise.

Capiroba is, without a doubt, a marginal character right from the beginning. The year is 1647, and in the first introduction to Capiroba the reader finds out that he is a cannibal with a peculiar preference for Dutch meat.³ However, and although he was not born a cannibal, Capiroba has always been an outsider; his conception and childhood were manifested by rejection. Marked by an obscure identity (37) Capiroba seems then destined to follow his father's footsteps. Moreover, his ethnic background, born half Black, half Indian, is a recurrent motif in the *topos* of the Brazilian cannibal (Ferreira de Almeida 249). Our cannibal is thus connected to the "movimento antropófago de Oswald de Andrade devido ao humor com que o personagem é composto e por seguir o modelo modernista que incorporou o negro ao discurso sobre a antropofagia... (249). At this time there are no mentions of Capiroba's eating habits, but one can definitely assert that he is not part of the group activities in any circumstance, and most likely, also excluded at meal time. In fact, we know that he is often kept either tied or in captivity, with other damned individuals whose only contact with the external world are the priests' visits (43).

As the text tells us, Capiroba becomes a cannibal as a result of an increased mental disturbance. One day, in a rapid succession of events, he steals two women and disappears. Initially, Capiroba is driven to cannibalism out of necessity. After spending six days with his women⁴, hungry and disillusioned, he spots and recognizes one of the priests (42). Upon killing his first victim with a swift and precise blow to the head, Capiroba goes on to prepare several exquisite recipes:

...cort[ou] um pouco da carne de primeira para churrasquear na brasa. O resto dele charqueou bem charqueado em belas mantas rosadas, que estendeu num varal para pegar sol. Dos miúdos prepararam ensopado, moqueca de miolo bem temperada na pimenta, buchada com abóbora, espetinho de coração com aipim, farofinha de tutano, passarinha no dendê, mocotó rico com todas as partes fortes do peritônio e sanguinho talhado, costela assada, culhõesinhos na brasa, rinzinho amolecido no

leite de coco mais mamão, iscas de fígado no touchinho do lombo, faceira e orelhas bem salgadinhas, meninico bem dormidinho para pegar sabor, e um pouco de lingüiça, aproveitando as tripas lavadas no limão, de acordo com as receitas que aquele mesmo padre havia ensinado às mulheres da Redução, a fim de que preparassem algumas para ele. (42–3)

It is ironic that it was the priest who taught the village women such recipes, whose body now becomes the canvas for Capiroba's culinary *savoir-faire*. It becomes clear that what seemed to be an act of necessity soon acquires an unexpected symbolism; by exhibiting his knowledge of cuisine emphasized by the usage of real recipes, Capiroba's acts of cannibalism will prove to be unique and unlike any other traditional account.

Sagan affirms that institutionalized cannibalism is found only in the societies we call "primitive"(1), and that the cannibal possesses two very important features: he enjoys eating human flesh and, secondly, eating the vanquished is as important to warfare as it is victory (4). Sagan then goes on to illustrate the savage nature of the cannibal by including anthropologic accounts of such acts. However, these accounts differ greatly from those of the Capiroba. In Sagan's tales, the participants exhibit savage-like behaviour where macabre details of torn limbs and dismantled body parts of an often still alive body, document the sadistic tendency of the cannibal (8–9). In the novel, as we will analyze in detail, even though a cannibal, Capiroba is not the chief of a "primitive" society, but rather a civilized and organized man, who, along with the other members of the household prepare exquisite meals, possesses a deep culinary knowledge and uses cooking utensils, thus participating in the world of culture rather than nature. Furthermore, he does not enjoy all human meat, but only the one best suited for his family due to its digestive properties, taste, and culinary capabilities. Contrary to the many rituals that accompany the cannibal acts cited by Sagan, there is no mention of such behaviours in the novel. We do not know of any rites performed by the family, it seems that not only does everyone partake in the preparation of the food, but also eating. This is a rare occurrence in most accounts of cannibalism as they are structured by many rules and prohibitions that govern all aspects of the act. It is true that the priests condemned and spoke against cannibalism, but the indications of how these acts were performed were minimal. The fact that he does not follow any ritualistic behaviour common to cannibalistic societies could be simply because he does not know of any. However, Capiroba lacks the sadistic trait of the conventional cannibal. He is in fact compassionate towards his "prey". Upon capturing the Dutch man, later known as Sinique, Capiroba regrets having to restrain the "cattle," and even tried "with good manners" to calm the animal because he did not enjoy mistreating them (50).

For Capiroba then, the Dutch are mere animals. The text produces many examples of this attitude. For instance, Capiroba watches these “beautiful animals” with anticipation, and even compares them to “incautious deer”. Using words like “presa” clearly indicate that these blond haired creatures are simply not human, at least not in his eyes. The first Dutch captured are Nikolaas Eijkman and Heike Zernike, who are then kept in a “cercadinho”; scared and agitated, they exhibit animal-like behaviour:

Aquimã depois de resistir uns dias esbravejando dentro do cercadinho, sacudindo os mourões de tal maneira que o caboco Capiroba foi obrigado... a quebrar um dedo de cada mão dele. Evitava também assim que Sinique, cujos modos agitados e algaravia incessante já começavam a irritá-lo, cavasse um buraco para desalojar os mourões, como chegara a tentar. (50)

Without other alternatives, Capiroba is forced to use physical punishment on, what he calls “caititu demente [que insistia] em mostrar os dentes e coincar seus sons incompreensíveis” (50). In order to control the creature Capiroba proceeds to put a ring through Sinique’s nose, after all, “como os outros de sua espécie, era um bicho bronco, que não entendia as ordens mais simples” (52). In addition, as Caboco Capiroba learns, these creatures appear to have names. Puzzled, he comments:

Ah, então eram coisas diferentes, como se dava isto? O caboco comparou os dois com um olhar experiente. Mesmo tamanho, mesmos cabelos, mesma roupa, mesmos sons animalescos, provavelmente o mesmo gosto. Não se podia dizer que um fosse um aquimã e outro fosse um sinique, não havia diferença que justificasse duas palavras. Seriam nomes então, eles tinham nomes. (51)

The possibility that two identical animals might have names is indeed troubling for the Caboco since he truly does not accept their humanity. What he does recognize is that they can be domesticated; in fact, Vu successfully teaches Sinique “uma nova arte, que era comer lambiscos da passarinha, da lingüiça e da carne-de-sol de Aquimã” (54). Caboco takes pleasure in having a “holandês ensinado na sua criação” and even dreams of having many, who would eventually have to be put down due to age or lack of productivity (54). Capiroba’s treatment of the Dutch is not different from any other western attitude towards edible meats such as chicken or pork. In reality, we tend to sympathize with this character not only because he does not resemble the traditional image of the cannibal in any way; the Dutch are indeed viewed as cattle. And, despite the fact that he still treats them well, they are no more than a food source. Just moments before his death, Capiroba wishes that the Dutch had colonized his land instead of the Portuguese. Unmistakably, he is resentful of a culture that oppressed him, but also he has a very practical reason to prefer the Dutch: since he has tasted their flesh, he knew that it was

superior to that of the Portuguese, which he considered, at best, a second rate meat (55).

It is possible to consider Capiroba's actions as a return to his roots as some suggest that the act of eating relates to a historical preference for certain foods; Barthes states for example that in the case of French cuisine, food preferences "rediscover long-forgotten secrets. The historical theme ... frequently carries notions of representing the flavorful survival of an old, rural society" (24). Viewed in this manner it is predictable that Capiroba as an outcast, longs for his pre-colonial origins. By associating with his ancestors, Capiroba returns to a simpler time, and most importantly, to a society where he would not be considered inferior. Back then, being a cannibal, as he was taught, was a normal practice. In addition, in those days notions of Good and Bad were unknown concepts to the villagers:

...[a]ntes da Redução, a aldeia era composta de gente muito ignorante, que nem sequer tinha uma lista pequena para o Bem e o Mal e, na realidade, nem mesmo dispunha de boas palavras para designar essas duas coisas tão importantes. Depois da Redução, viu-se que alguns eram maus e outros eram bons, apenas antes não se sabia. (39)

It is highly symbolic that Capiroba's mental condition worsens just as attentions to these concepts are heightened. Clearly, Capiroba does not subscribe to the distinctions of Good and Bad proclaimed by the priests. Upon rejecting these notions, Capiroba returns to his roots, to a time of equality amongst all, and most important, free of any undesirable moral scrutiny.

Adding to Capiroba's sympathetic personality is his newly civilized and cultured behaviour. Again, and contrary to traditional accounts, each meal is carefully prepared with the upmost attention, from the best cuts to methods and spices. Capiroba is a knowledgeable chef; he and his women gather to barbecue, roast, boil, salt and even make *lingüiça* with tripe carefully washed with lemon. These actions are indicators of a civilized behaviour, and not those of a savage. By preparing such elaborated dishes, Capiroba establishes a situation where food, like language, is filled with significance. In "The Culinary Triangle" Lévi-Strauss stresses the similarities between food and language; the act of cooking as language are universal human activities, and there is not a society that does not possess these two elements. The way each society differentiates between edible and non-edible, between cooked and raw, and the preferences for different modes of cooking defines that society's culture. It suffices to recall, for instance, the world views on edible animals and inedible ones such as the ones we consider as pets and those that are not.⁵

One of the relevant distinctions brought forward by Levi-Strauss is the opposition between raw/nature and cooked/culture. Roasting for instance,

due to the contact with fire, is placed on the side of nature, but boiling, because it requires the use of a cultural receptacle is placed on the side of culture (29–30). As we know, Capiroba and his family are not only able cooks, but possess several cultural receptacles. For example, cooking the six sailors was not an easy task, and due to the toughness of the meat, required a pot (44). The use of the pot strengthens this newly founded culture. In a similar way, following Danesi's vignette on Robinson Crusoe,⁶ Capiroba founds a society where the preparation of food has strict guidelines developed according to the family's needs as well as the suitability of the meat. The division of labour is clear: he is the hunter and the killer, and the women are the cooks. Therefore, the fact that Capiroba only kidnaps women is not trivial, but comes to support his desire to form his own private society. The women were the ones who were taught how to cook by the priests (43), without them, and without their recipes there would be nothing to connect Capiroba to the world of culture. After all, women were the transformers of the raw into the cooked, or better yet, of nature into culture.

By eating human meat only, Capiroba has created a new culture whose practices exclude any other groups. He participates in what Grignon has defined as an act of segregative commensality that usually consists of "[meeting] for eating and drinking [in] a way to set up or to restore the group by closing it, a way to assert or to strengthen a 'We' by pointing out and rejecting, as symbols of otherness, the 'not We', strangers, rivals, enemies, superiors or inferiors" (28–29). In this new group Capiroba's life moves from the periphery to the centre, from marginality to mainstream, and, most importantly, from exclusion to inclusion; this shift gives him the opportunity to be the head of the family, responsible for the well being of all. For the first time, the caboco experiences a feeling of pride when at dinner time he congratulates himself for such a delightful prey, and even dreams of one day having a few "heads" in a pasture (45).

Again, this is a common human reaction, and does not differ at all from any other food gatherings where people express delight for a certain meal. Amleto Ferreira experiences the same feeling of pride upon admiring his plentiful table (229). Thus, Capiroba, an individual without culture, not belonging either to the Indian or the African, excluded from both the colonized and the colonizers, appropriates the only signs known to him: the cannibalism of his ancestors, and the newly acquired "civilized" behaviour centered around food. As Danesi remarks, humans have the ability to invent and represent the world with signs that best fit our needs (*Sign* 48).

A clear indication that Capiroba does not resort to cannibalism for survival is established by juxtaposing the family's hunger and nature's

abundant harvest. It is as if the family does not recognize nature's food sources:

...eles se agradaram de carne humana...com muitas bocas para sustentar, [o caboco] passou a consumir um maior número de brancos, a ponto de, em alguns períodos, declarar-se uma certa escassez. Até que, bastante mais tempo depois, as frutas do verão dando em pencas e caindo pelo chão,...e as mantas de tainhas saracoteando irrequietas por toda a costa da ilha, saiu para tentar a sorte meio sem esperança e voltou arrastando um holandês louro.... (43-4)

Human meat, and most importantly, white meat since Capiroba does not eat his kind, becomes the main and most desired commodity. The fact that fish and fruit are not considered to be adequate food is revealing of a cannibalistic act beyond survival. Capiroba describes eating the first Dutch in the following manner:

O flamengo tinha o gosto um pouco brando, a carne um tico pálida e adocicada, mas tão tenra e suave, tão leve no estômago, tão estimada pelas crianças, prestando-se tão versatilmente a todo uso culinário, que cedo todos deram de preferi-lo a qualquer outro alimento, até mesmo o caboco Capiroba, cujo paladar, antes rude, se tornou de tal sorte afeito à carne flamenga que às vezes chegava mesmo a ter entulhos, só de pensar em certos portugueses e espanhóis que em outros tempos havia comido, principalmente padres e funcionários da Coroa, os quais lhe evocavam agora uma memória oleosa, quase sebenta, de grande morrinha e invencível graveolência. (44)

Capiroba is selective. He has 'developed a taste' for a strange food, a common cultural behaviour that reflects our perception of edible/inedible, transforming it into a delicacy, in the same matter that we come to like and accept Mexican and Oriental food as exotic treats (*Sign* 168). Up to this point, he has been eating only whites and the recipes vary according to each one's meat. For example, Jacob Ferreiro do Monte was considered to be the best "chicken" ever tasted; Diogo Serrano, along with his wife, children and servant had a sort of a discrete taste, and were easy to digest; Fradique Padilha's meat could only be used for bacon since it was old and "esfiapado" (44), and so the list goes on. The extraordinary experience of tasting Dutch meat for the first time causes them to reject Portuguese or Spanish meat in favour of the new, tender and versatile Dutch meat. After all, the distinction between edible and inedible is not a natural one, but rather imposed by culture (*Sign* 167). Now, Portuguese and Spanish meat becomes inedible. Capiroba returns to his roots, but as a civilized modern man, surrounded not only by his family, but by cooks, familiar with spices, cooking methods, etc. The utensils used, the preparation and even the daily gatherings for meal are cultural signs that leads us to view the cannibal family in a sympathetic light;

by participating in the sign codes common to us all, Capiroba's acts of cannibalism can be easily overlooked.

Capiroba is killed but his soul reincarnates centuries later in the body of Perilo Ambrósio. However, contrary to the discriminatory taste of Capiroba, Perilo Ambrósio exhibits an unusual and voracious appetite. When we first encounter this character he is "sentado debaixo de uma jaqueira com as pernas esticadas e abertas, comendo um pão de milho meio seco e dando dentadas enormes num pedaço de chouriço assado" (20). While the two slaves with "famished eyes" watch him eat, he does not show them any sympathy; quite the contrary, he becomes aggressive towards them. At this time he admits that he has always had a particular relationship with food by recalling the feelings of deception and frustration during his childhood:

Sempre fora assim...Podia ser uma expectativa frustrada, podia ser qualquer coisa, até mesmo alguém que conseguisse chegar antes a um naco em que estivesse de mi-
ra feita, apesar da boca cheia e da atenção vigilantíssima que costumava dar a toda a
comida sobre a mesa, enquanto devorava fragorosamente a que empilhava nas duas
ou três selhas de louça da terra que lhe serviam de pratos. (21)

Ambrósio's voracious appetite is such that he often assaulted his sisters. He remembers one particular time when in order to claim a piece of meat and without being able to speak due to having his mouth filled with food, he stabs his sister (21). Later, he recalls that experience, and admits that "j-
mais...existirá em toda a Terra carne suficiente para matar a fome por aque-
le pedaço usurpado e arrancado à força de seus dentes desesperados" (21). These gatherings contrast immensely with Capiroba's; contrary to the peaceful and orderly atmosphere that accompany the "cannibal's" meals, Ambrósio's meals are underlined by violence, driven by his excessive appetite. According to Brown, appetite thus denotes distance, the space between "I" and the "world" (*Fictional Meals* 12). He adds that: "...by eating, man ingests and incorporates the world-object. Appetite, moreover always signals a real or symbolic emptiness...In Freudian terms appetite is equivalent to the specific desire to reduce and annihilate...the space between 'me' and the 'world'" (12). Looking at his social interactions, one observes that there is a real distance between the baron and all the other characters. Due to his behaviour he was expelled from home at an early age, and never re-established a relationship with his family; quite the contrary, and as we later learn, he joined forces alongside the Brazilians only to get his family's estate (23). His own wife despises him, although she can only make such terrible confession to her priest (87), and even Amleto Ferreira, one of his most faithful servants, admits that "desviara os recursos do barão e se apropriara de tudo em que pudera pôr as mãos" (229).

Paulo Medeiros aptly states that “eating disorders are not primarily about food [but rather] the outcome of profound conflicts between individuals and their parents and society as they attempt to fashion (or to understand) themselves in relation (or opposition) to prescribed roles...” (12). It is crucial to recall that, in spite of the baron’s riches, he is still the reincarnation of Capiroba’s soul, a marginal character, who centuries later, still does not belong to any community. After all the efforts that Antônia Vitória invests in preparing an elaborate lunch and an even better dinner, the baron harshly criticizes her by calling the food a “malassada” [que] não estava muito diferente da comida dos negros, embora a tivesse devorado quase inteira” (87). Although our first introduction to the baron can be interpreted as an exercise of social power (Rappoport 34), there are bigger issues at hand. The cliché that Leon Rappoport brings forth “eating is as much or more a matter of the mind as it is of the body” (13) sheds light on the baron’s behaviour. It is through the baron’s eating habits that we are able to determine his identity and his lack of adjustment to the world that surrounds him. The connections between eating habits and identity are remarkable. Food related habits can identify social and emotional behaviours; for instance low class people prefer sweet foods, while those moving up in the social ladder tend to modify their preferences accordingly (Rappoport 53, 55). For some, like Perilo Ambrósio, childhood relationships with food carry lifetime implications (Rappoport 62).

One of these implications for Ambrósio is loneliness. In fact, in psychological terms appetite can also symbolize an anxiety for something, such as affection (Chaplin 239). Perilo Ambrósio does not have any true relationships, and, as we have noted, is despised by most. The baron’s appetite extends to sexual relations where he exhibits the same voracity: “e finalmente pegando a negrinha Vevé...deplorá-la de um só golpe...sentir qualquer estalo de pele ou cartilagem se rompendo...até encostar os ossos dela em suas banhas” (91). James Brown explains that according to Freud:

...orality and sexuality form links in the same developmental chain...between “me” and the “other”...constitute the most direct and intimate forms of communication with the world. Consequently, the act of eating becomes the archetype of intercourse, both sexual and social. (“On the Semigenesis” 327)

In addition to the evident connection that links the act of eating to sexual acts as well, we are faced once again with a behaviour usually attributed to the cannibal. Sarah Sceats affirms that cannibalism is an extreme form of dehumanization which “with its qualities of rampant power and insatiability, suggest the absolute supremacy of the consumer” (122). Certainly, Ambrósio’s encounter with Vevé is not different from the ones with food. She is

devoid of humanity. During the encounter he devours and consumes her in the same fashion he does with food; as Sçeats pointed out, rampant and insatiable.

Similarly to Capiroba, Perilo Ambrósio thinks of food in the days close to his death:

...ao despeito de saber que os outros continuavam comendo à vontade e, ignorando o que lhe ponderavam até mesmo as negras da cozinha, atafalhava-se de tudo em que podia meter as mãos, em expedições embrutecidas ao fogão e aos guardacomidas. (163)

It appears that the caboco Capiroba would have been better suited to live in Ambrósio's time. After all, Capiroba was a gentle, kind soul, he even became a "farmer" of sorts with one domesticated Dutch in his corral. He exhibits a civilized behaviour by being kind to the "animals," by following culture's rites of commensality, and by surrounding himself with a loving family. Ambrósio, on the other hand, exhibits the sadistic, cruel behaviour ascribed to the cannibal. The violation of Vevé with its graphic details of torn cartilage resembles indeed the cannibal act. Contrary to Capiroba, he does not have a loving family, and doesn't follow civilized commensality acts.

We can thus conclude that Caboco Capiroba and Perilo Ambrósio tell us who they are through food. As Ferreira de Almeida points out, the cannibalism in *Viva o Povo Brasileiro* can be read along the same lines as Oswald de Andrade's anthropophagi because it represents the consumption of a foreign culture in order to form the other: the Brazilian (256). We undoubtedly tend to sympathize with Capiroba due to the fact that we understand his position. It is true that food plays an important role in culture, and by choosing to become what he believes his ancestors were, Capiroba finds his own cultural identity. On the one hand, he longs for the time when these foreigners did not inhabit his land; but, on the other hand, he has also been influenced by these Others, who have brought with them the recipes that he has eagerly adopted. Ironically, as Capiroba's actions suggest, Brazilian culture is not a mere return to cannibalism, but rather an intertwined tapestry of old and new traditions. Food, and its related activities follow the codes considered to be civilized. It is impossible for Capiroba to return completely to his ancestry; after all, he is a "modern" cannibal, equipped with the Other's recipes and culture.

Centuries later we are faced with Perilo Ambrósio, a despicable character. Despite the fact that he has a vast estate we soon learn that in many ways, he is more of a cannibal than Capiroba ever was. However, and perhaps the most troublesome is the fact that we have been told that they share

the same soul. It remains then to decipher how this soul has reincarnated in its complete opposite. Nevertheless, one small detail discloses it all: Ambrósio no longer accepts his Brazilian heritage because “a verdade é que se considerava português” (23). Perilo Ambrósio, like many characters in his world, is the result of centuries of European influence, which ultimately translates into the loss of the Other: the Brazilian. The baron of Pirapuama’s relationship with food is a sign of that loneliness, that dream for an independent culture, that was once pursued by Capiroba, but never resolved. His alienation leads him on a rampage, consuming everything and everyone.

In a way, this now Portuguese soul, truly symbolizes Montaigne’s view on cannibalism. Regrettably, Capiroba’s dream, that the Portuguese had never colonized his land, is not only a thing of the past, but it has been completely obliterated. Due to the extreme violence that characterizes Ambrósio’s relationship with food and others in general, we can assert that Capiroba no longer exists; even though the cannibal persists in Ambrósio. We return to the two apparently unconnected quotes with which we started this article, only to conclude that they are intimately bounded. The seeming civilized baron is in reality the cannibal, who consumes all: food and people alike. And while he does not kill, he tortures and consumes them alive. Capiroba chooses to honour his ancestors and becomes a cannibal. However, he is not a vicious killer, he simply hunts these “animals,” that while under his care, are treated with compassion. Ultimately, the text leads us to ponder the meaning of cannibalism and the power of food in the making of the Brazilian soul.

Notes

¹ The importance of the apple derives from the biblical account of Adam and Eve, and while beef is considered sacred in Indian culture, it’s a popular consumption in the western world (Danesi, *Sign*166). Similarly, rabbits, cats and dogs are considered pets by westerners and therefore deemed inedible (Danesi and Perron 237).

² Grignon gives as an example the French aristocratic elite whose access to selective club-restaurants serves to mark the distinction between them and the common civil servants (30).

³ This preference is not accidental, but rather reflects a historical reality of the occupation of northern Brazil by the Dutch. Ironically, by eating the Dutch, Capiroba will contribute towards their eradication from Brazil.

⁴ The association of Capiroba with the two women is important because according to Christian and Brazilian historiography, cannibalism as well as witchcraft were mainly associated with

women (Ferreira de Almeida 248–49).

⁵ Danesi illustrates this issue of the edible/inedible by remarking on how someone who possesses a rabbit as a pet, would not be able to eat rabbit, a meat widely accepted in other cultures (*Sign* 163).

⁶ Just like Robinson Crusoe abandoned on a deserted island, and driven by hunger, one would not mind eating raw food; survival would take on precedent over cuisine. However, if after a while and upon finding other individuals on the island under the same circumstances, a division of labor would take place as well as an organized food preparation, where the communal likes and dislikes would be taken into account (*Sign* 165).

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