Verbal Violence and the Pursuit of Power in *Apareceu a Margarida*

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Traditionally, the monologue, as a theatrical form, has been held in low esteem because its nature excludes the possibility of a conflict to develop. However, much of the forcefulness of Roberto Athayde's monologue *Apareceu a Margarida* [1] stems from the implication that a conflict does exist between the oppressive Dona Margarida and her fifth-grade students, and that were it not for the teacher's tyranny, the conflict would inevitably surface. Moreover, Athayde's play is very appropriate to the study of verbal violence in the theatre because, as a monologue, its sole addresser is in full control of the situation and does not have to contend with dissension on stage.

At issue here is, of course, a fundamental aspect of verbal violence, the ability of one faction to prevent its opponents from verbalizing their grievances. Historically, that was the attitude of the Portuguese and Spanish colonizers in Latin America. The Portuguese were particularly successful in avoiding dissent in Brazil by vigorously prohibiting the functioning of any printing machine in the colony until as late as 1808. Ironically, the dismal effects of that policy were deplored very early by Padre António Vieira, a seventeenth-century luminary and member of an institution, the Catholic Church, then usually identified with the repressive forces. In his "Sermão da Visitação de Nossa Senhora," Vieira first compares the colony to a child who, like the students in Dona Margarida's class, is not allowed to speak, and then establishes a connection between Brazil's problems and the lack of freedom of expression in the colony:

> Infante quer dizer o que não fala. Neste estado estava . . . o Brasil muitos anos que foi, a meu ver, a maior ocasião de seus males. Como doente não pode falar, toda outra conjectura dificulta muito a medicina. Por isso Cristo nenhum enfermo curou com mais dificuldade, e em nenhum milagre gastou mais tempo, que em curar um endemoniado mudo; o pior acidente que teve o Brasil em sua enfermidade foi o tolher-se-lhe a fala: muitas vezes se quis queixar

> justamente, muitas vezes quis pedir os remédios de seus males, mas sempre lhe afogou as palavras na garganta, ou o respeito ou a violência: e se alguma vez chegou algum gemido aos ouvidos de quem devera remediar, chegaram também as vozes do poder e venceram os clamores da razão.[2]

As we know, power struggles did not cease after Brazil and the Spanish American colonies gained their political independence from Portugal and Spain. The conflicts were subsequently to take place within Latin American society itself, with the groups vying for control of the political process and consequent socio-economic manipulation of the less influential segments of the population often resorting to suppression of their opponents' free expression.

In his study of the uses of verbal language, the English philosopher John L. Austin distinguishes among "locution" (the mere act of speech), "illocution" (the uttering of a sentence as an act-in-itself), and "perlocution" (the successful use of words to bring about an action on someone else's part).[3] To these, John Searle has added two other types of verbal communication—expressions of threat or promises—which share a striking uniformity of logical structure,[4] and David Bell, adding in his turn to Austin and Searle, maintains that only those verbal communications which involve threat or promises are to be included in a definition of power.[5] Since, due to the essence of drama and theatre, an addressee (limited to the reader or spectator in the case of monologues) is always presupposed, the examples of verbal violence used in this article illustrate Austin's perlocution group as well as Bell's definition of power. Moreover, the form of power that concerns me here is gained by the successful use of utterances which by calling attention to instances of violence indicate, in Sherman Stanage's terms, "violative modes" or, simply, "violatives."[6] In his attempt to connect Austin's phenomenological linguistics with Robin G. Collingwood's notions on civilization, Stanage presents violatives as utterances meant

> to call attention to, to present, and to state cases of violence agreed upon, or accepted, as acts of violence within a civil community. . . . They are . . . measures of . . . departures from an established civil order. They are the modulated articulations of violent phenomena felt, experienced, and known by persons who use the language.[7]

Based on language's multimodality, i.e. the linguistic function which enables us to perform distinct modes of utterance, such as the indicative, imperative, or subjunctive, Stanage has proposed the violative as that mode which, as indicated by the suffix -IVE, "intends the nature, character, or quality of violence, or the . . . tendency towards violence."[8] In *Reason and Violence,* Stanage lists thirty-five verbs connoting violence in kind and degree, and invites contributions to his list.[9] *Apareceu a Margarida* not only illustrates some of the violatives compiled by Stanage but also provides the critic with additions to Stanage's list. Among the more important examples of violatives found in Athayde's text are: the use of foul language, or "abusives"; the use of language as provocation, or "provocatives" (which Stanage prefers to call "perturbives"); the use of language to threaten physical aggression, or "threatives" (which Stanage prefers to call "stopives"); and, not included in

Stanage's list, the use of reports of violent situations, or "reportives," and the use of distorted language, or "distortives."

In the theatre of Brazil, as in its everyday life, the use of abusives is the most frequent form of verbal violence. The abundance of examples of obscene language in *Apareceu a Margarida* makes the selection of one quotation rather difficult. One can consider, for instance, the passage in which the teacher charges around the classroom while pouring abusives on the defenseless students:

> Vocês aqui não participam de nada! De porra nenhuma! Eu digo, vocês acreditam. E vão todos pra puta que os pariu! Quem manda aqui sou eu! (26)

While provocatives are used in dialogue situation to exasperate deeply another character and thus incite him or her to anger and, often, to physical aggression, the monologue convention proves to be ideally suited to Athayde's denunciation of tyranny. *Apareceu a Margarida* presents a considerable amount of provocation from the repressive teacher who is, of course, assured that there can be no retaliation from the other side. Thus, a good deal of irony accompanies Dona Margarida's screams at the necessarily unresponsive students:

> Vocês têm medo de falar. Ninguém diz porra nenhuma nessa classe. São uns covardes! Pois que digam na minha frente o que tiverem que dizer! Podem falar! Podem falar! (29)

Because Dona Margarida is very aware of her talent for language manipulation, she can make masterful use of threatives as well. By exploring fundamental human fears, the teacher-tyrant is able to intimidate the students, and thus maintain her control over them. One of Dona Margarida's most powerful threatives is based on the universal fear of anal rape: "Silêncio! SILÊNCIO! Enfio esse quadro-verde no rabo do primeiro que der um pio" (26). The irony behind her eloquent calls for silence is that there *is* absolute silence on the part of the students, the entire turmoil being caused by the woman herself. An equally powerful threative explores the fear of confinement:

> Eu posso deixar vocês todos sem saída. A classe inteira sem saída. Todo mundo dentro dessa sala fazendo linhas! Cinco mil linhas daquela frase: Todo mundo quer ser dona Margarida! Boto vocês a noite inteira copiando! (25)

It is important to notice that the students do react to this unacceptable scenario, and that they do so in a striking nonverbal expression. To signal their discontentment, they light up "um barbantinho fedorento" toward the end of the "Primeira Aula." As a consequence, Dona Margarida is "fora de si" and resorts to threatives in her response to the students' audacity: "Eu mato, eu esfolo o autor dessa sacanagem! Eu arrebento, eu parto a cara de quem fez isso!" (36).

After the "Recreio," in order to maintain her control over the students in the "Segunda Aula," in addition to using more abusives, provocatives, and threatives, Dona Margarida resorts to reports of violent situations. By means of reportives, the teacher intimates to the fifth-graders the horrible things that can happen in the principal's office. If one keeps in mind that on the allegorical level the situation in *Apareceu a Margarida* recalls the climate of a police state, and that the principal's office can be associated with one of the torture chambers whereby a dictatorship is perpetuated, one can experience, with Dona Margarida's class, the horror triggered by the tyrannical teacher's suggestive report of disappearances:

> A maior desgraça que pode acontecer a um aluno de quinta série é ir para a sala do Diretor! São poucos os infelizes que D. Margarida já mandou para a sala do Diretor. Nenhum deles voltou até hoje. (41)

The object of the next type of violatives to be examined here is verbal language itself. Distortives represent an indirect form of personal aggression since the reader or spectator cannot help but feel disturbed by the disruption of their world view that is brought about by any attempt to distort or deny aspects of their own language. The distortives used by Dona Margarida are essentially assaults on the literalness of language. Ironically, their illogical quality points to the disorder which rules the world of this figure who claims to stand for law, order, and tradition, yet informs her students that "Biologia é a ciência da vida. Da vida alheia. A ciência da vida privada chama-se medicina" (31), and that "Evolução não é nada. Evolução não existe. É tudo sempre a mesma coisa! Tudo sempre a mesma merda! . . . E revolução é duas vezes uma evolução. Duas vezes nada, nada" (30). At the end of the play, after regaining consciousness, Dona Margarida apologizes to the class for being ill, and resorts to another distortive when she tells them that her indisposition "foi um enfarte de . . . *teoria na coronária*" (56; italics and spacing in the text).

By now, it should be clear that *Miss Margarida's Way,* to borrow the title of the English version of the play,[10] is imposed on the addressees by virture of her power as verbal organizer and successful manipulator of words. Throughout both "Primeira Aula" and "Segunda Aula" Dona Margarida's students are ruthlessly bombarded with the text of this "Monólogo tragicômico para uma mulher impetuosa," to use one of the two slightly different versions of the subtitle of the play (5, 19). Seen as a whole, the text can be approached as one piece of artillery with which the teacher incessantly assaults the students. As she instructs her class in the "fatos da vida," Dona Margarida can be extraordinarily funny, scary, absurd, sentimental, and pathetic—often simultaneously. But regardless of the emotion she arouses, the teacher is always violent, since her speech amounts to a continuous shelling of the students. What follows is only one of the many long passages which could be quoted to illustrate the teacher's verbal bombardment of the students. As she lectures on logic, Dona Margarida lets out this verbal fusillade:

> Só há uma maneira de enfrentar um problema com segurança e eficiência: é ter o conhecimento completo de todas as possibilidades de solução e todas as possibilidades que cada uma dessas possibilidades ofereceria. D. Margarida, por exemplo, jamais inicia nenhuma ação

sem ter esse conhecimento detalhado e completo. Digamos, por exemplo, que D. Margarida deseje fazer um passeio a pé pelas ruas de Ipanema. D. Margarida sai de seu apartamento, toma o elevador, desce para a portaria e logo se vê confrontada com uma escolha ou opção. D. Margarida deve escolher entre dobrar à direita ou à esquerda. Suponhamos que D. Margarida dobrou à direita. Logo D. Margarida encontrará uma esquina com um cruzamento e um sinal. As possibilidades portanto são as seguintes: 1) Atravessar a rua e continuar na mesma direção no mesmo lado da rua. 2) Virar sumariamente à esquerda. 3) Atravessar a rua e só então virar à esquerda. 4) Atravessar a rua para a direita seguindo então para a direita perpendicularmente ao caminho original. 5) Atravessar a rua para a direita e só então virar à esquerda atravessando uma vez mais a rua e seguindo na mesma direção inicial pelo outro lada da rua. 6)Atravessar a rua para a direita e então virar mais uma vez à direita seguindo na direção oposta à inicial pelo outro lado da rua. 7) Atravessar a rua para a frente e só então virar à direita atravessando uma vez mais a rua e seguindo para a direita perpendicularmente à direção inicial. A oitava possibilidade é voltar imediatamente para a casa dando o passeio por terminado. Como vocês viram, apareceram oito possibilidades igualmente válidas de passeio a pé. Ora, seja qual for dessas possibilidades a escolhida ela levará D. Margarida a uma segunda esquina com cruzamento e sinal luminoso. A possibilidade número um levaria D. Margarida à esquina da rua de D. Margarida com a transversal seguinte. Essa esquina ofereceria então mais oito possibilidades. A segunda possibilidade, que consiste em virar sumariamente à esquerda, conduziria D. Margarida a uma esquina do mesmo bloco de D. Margarida imediatamente à esquerda da primeira esquina. Essa segunda possibilidade também oferece mais oito possibilidades de passeio a pé. Só aí D. Margarida já tem 128 possibilidades de passeio a serem consideradas. Cada uma dessas 128 possibilidades conduz a uma nova esquina ou bifurcação. Multiplique-se então por oito essas 128 possibilidades de passeio a pé. Vamos ver já no quadro-verde. *(Multiplica 128 por 8.)* 1024! Há portanto 1024 esquinas ou encruzilhadas a que D. Margarida chegaria, as quais ofereceriam por sua vez 8192 possibilidades de passeio a pé. Resumindo para vocês, D. Margarida encontrou vinte e quatro bilhões setecentos e treze milhões quatrocentos e trinta e três mil quinhentas e onze possibilidades de passeio a pé. D. Margarida, antes de sair para qualquer espécie de passeio, estuda e conhece cada uma dessas possibilidades e possíveis conseqüências. D. Margarida, antes de sair de casa, sabe exatamente como funciona o esquema, o mecanismo, a estrutura, a forma, a substância, o conteúdo, o âmago desse passeio a pé! (51-52)

The lengthy quotation is warranted not only because it exposes Dona Margarida's twisted logic but especially because it leads to a detailed revelation of the sources of the woman's control of others. It is her intimate knowledge of the structure of discourse, Dona Margarida explains to her students as she paces around the stage in a frenzy, that constitutes the essence of her power:

Substantivos! Verbos! Advérbios! Adjetivos! O mundo inteiro está nas mãos de D. Margarida! Ouviram bem? . . . D. Margarida *manda* nos verbos. D. Margarida *manda* nos adjetivos. D. Margarida manda em tudo! Nos advérbios! Nos substantivos! *(Frenética.)* Eu mando nas frases inteiras! Eu boto uns depois dos outros! Eu boto um substantivo, a substância, a coisa, a disciplina, e boto um verbo, aprender, esperar, massacrar, e um advérbio, impetuosamente, brutalmente, adocicadamente, e um adjetivo, sujo, preto, surdo, magro, eu faço uma frase inteira! Sou *eu* que faço! Eu sou *dona* de tudo o que eu digo. . . . D. Margarida é *dona* de todas as matérias! A história! A geografia! A teoria, a gramática, a semântica, a patologia, a matemática, a biologia, a anatomia, a pedagogia, a astronomia, hidrografia, geologia, psiquiatria, taquigrafia, religião, química, mineralogia, lingüística, estatística, geometria! *(Aos berros, já com a voz inteiramente distorcida, como louca, prestes a explodir.)* A ciência!!! A ciência toda!!! Tudo! (54-55; italics in the text)

The artillery only ceases with Dona Margarida's collapse shortly after she utters the word "Tudo." At this point, one of students hesitantly walks up to the stage and proceeds to save the woman's life by applying a vigorous cardiac massage. In this significant development, the oppressor is revived by one of the oppressed, who thus becomes a willing instrument in the perpetuation of a situation which has been stifling the class he represents. Having regained consciousness, speaking *"num tom novo ainda não usado na peça e que deve soar o mais sincero possível"* (56), Dona Margarida assures the students that her teaching career is by no means finished. In spite of the subdued, even affectionate tone of voice now used, Dona Margarida's last words, as she closes the "Segunda Aula," leave no doubt that her tyranny will continue. Immediately before she finally leaves the classroom, the teacher tells her ever so silent students that

D. Margarida vai estar *sempre* aqui com vocês. D. Margarida não vai parar de ensinar. D. Margarida nunca vai parar de ensinar. Hoje são vocês. Amanhã vão ser os filhos de vocês. Depois vão ser os filhos dos filhos de vocês. D. Margarida vai estar *sempre* aqui. . . . D. Margarida espera vocês todos aqui na próxima aula. D. Margarida ainda tem muito para ensinar a vocês. . . . Até a próxima aula. (56; italics in the text)

With the cessation of the verbal violence near the end of the play,[11] three points seem to be beyond dispute: first, that Dona Margarida's power is gained only at the expense of the students' free expression; second, that the woman's power is maintained only because of her incessant, sophisticated verbal assault on the students; and third, that the firmness of Dona Margarida's control of the class is directly proportional to her awareness of language's enormous coercive power.[12]

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Notes

1. Roberto Athayde, *Apareceu a Margarida: Monólogo tragicômico em dois atos* (Brasília: Editora Brasília, 1973). Page references to this play will be given in parentheses.

2. Padre António Vieira, "Sermão da Visitação de Nossa Senhora, pregado quando da chegada do Marquês de Montalvão, Vice-Rei do Brasil," *Obras completas* (Porto: Lello Irmãos, 1959), vol. 3: 330. My source for this quote was Paulo Freire, *Educação como prática da liberdade* (Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1967) 66-67n.

3. John L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1962) 109-21.

4. John R. Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969) 55-58.

5. David V. J. Bell, *Power, Influence, and Authority: An Essay in Political Linguistics* (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1975) 21.

6. Sherman Stanage, "Violatives: Modes and Themes of Violence," *Reason and Violence: Philosophical Investigations,* ed. Sherman Stanage (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1975) 229-32.

7. Stanage 231-32.

8. Stanage 234, note 7.

9. Stanage 230-31.

10. Roberto Athayde, *Miss Margarida's Way* (New York: Avon Books, 1979). No translator credited.

11. This paper is limited to the study of verbal language in *Apareceu a Margarida.* It should be noted, however, that the action does not end with Dona Margarida's exit. As described in detail in the 24-line-long stage direction which closes the printed text (56-57), the same student who had revived the teacher does not exit with Dona Margarida. A few moments after the woman leaves, he starts to search *"a bolsa de D. Margarida, preta, grande, fora de moda,"* and finds *"um grande e poderoso revólver"* at the bottom of the purse. Never saying a word, he puts the gun back on the teacher's table, eats some candy he had found in the purse, and finally, *"como se temesse a aparição de D. Margarida,"* returns to his desk. It is fundamental to understand that the last sentence of the closing stage direction explicitly calls for the young man's return *"para sua carteira,"* thus stressing the fact that the students cannot or will not leave the classroom, and that Dona Margarida's tyranny will, indeed, persist indefinitely.

12. This article is an expanded version of a paper presented in the Latin American Theatre section of the Southeast Conference on Foreign Languages and Literatures, Rollins College, March 2, 1985.