

**Spoken Like a True Poet:
The Recreation of Speech in Manuel Bandeira's *Libertinagem***
Eric Johnson

After reading an article by the renowned grammarian Álvaro Ferdinando de Sousa da Silveira, which advocated the continued usage of classical Portuguese, Manuel Bandeira proceeded to write his own article, called "Fala brasileira." Bandeira defended those who endeavored to use Brazilian language artistically in their work, and submitted that those who supported maintaining "the language of Camões," like Sousa da Silveira, were unfair to the artists who sought to promote the spoken language of Brazil (Negreiros 45). In his pointed conclusion, Bandeira went on to predict that traditional Portuguese would gradually be supplanted: "E o meu sentimento é que as formas brasileiras de linguagem falada serão chamadas a substituir as que o prof. Nascentes qualificou de lusitanizantes, com grande escândalo do prof. Sousa da Silveira" (Bandeira, *Seleta em Prosa* 37). But it was primarily in his poetry that Bandeira defined and defended this cause, penning verses that not only criticized language purists and praised common Brazilian speech, but also demonstrated "popular language" (Williams 219). Preceded by the likes of José de Alencar, Bandeira was neither the first nor the last Brazilian to "[aspire] to the illusion of speech" in his writing (Tapscott 11). However, he nonetheless acted as a pioneer of Brazilian Modernism in that many of his poems exhibit linguistic characteristics that are normally associated with oral language, especially his poems from the collection *Libertinagem*, which, according to Emanuel Moraes, represents the culminating point in the poet's participation in the Modernist movement (128). In this collection, Bandeira's poetry mimics the patterns of spoken language. Features such as repetition, colloquial vocabulary, idiomatic syntax, and pauses (to name only a few) blur the line between the poetic voice and Bandeira himself, including his memory of his boyhood self.

Repetition and paraphrasing play a major role in Bandeira's quest to imitate speech in *Libertinagem*, as exemplified by such poems as "Poética," "Vou-me embora pra Pásargada," "Cunhatã," and "O anjo da guarda." In spoken discourse, we often repeat ourselves in order to keep our train of thought, emphasize, paraphrase, reiterate, clarify, or even because of a handicap such as stuttering or common forgetfulness. In like manner, Bandeira frequently employs repetition in his poetry, casting the poetic voice as a real person who talks naturally and spontaneously, rather than a contrived being whose words seem to be edited and checked for redundancy. The repetition of words and phrases in "Poética" causes us to examine the very nature of words themselves and how we use them:

Todas as palavras sobretudo os barbarismos universais

Todas as construções sobretudo as sintaxes de exceção

Todos os ritmos sobretudo os inumeráveis

(Williams 222)

These three lines of parallel structure emphasize the poet's dissatisfaction with the poetry of the time by repeating "todos" and "sobretudo," reiterating the need to incorporate all kinds of

words, constructions, and rhythms into poetry, and not just the traditional forms. The resemblance with speech that these lines bear makes the poem seem autobiographical, since they agree with the position that Bandeira himself championed. And much like an impromptu, vehement speech, the poem contains a mixture of short lines interrupted by unnaturally long ones:

De resto não é lirismo

Será contabilidade tabela de co-senos secretário do amante exemplar com cem

modelos de cartas e as diferentes maneiras de agradar às mulheres, etc.

(Williams 222)

Emanuel de Moraes focuses on the repetition of the word “lirismo,” especially the phrase, “Estou farto do lirismo,” and how this imbues the lines of the poem with a sense of rhythm, almost like a preacher’s sermon (136). This usage of repetition shows how “Poética” resembles spoken language much more than typical written texts do. This, in conjunction with our knowledge of Bandeira, his views, and the historical context of Brazilian Modernism, causes the poetic voice to appear as though it were Bandeira himself. More examples of repetition arise in the form of paraphrasing in “Vou-me embora pra Pásargada”:

E quando eu estiver mais triste

Mas triste de não ter jeito

Quando de noite me der

Vontade de me matar...

(Libertinagem 36)

The poetic voice expresses his recurring or upcoming state of despair three times, even though he doesn’t restate it in the exact same words. Normal written text rarely repeats the same idea three times in such rapid succession, but this poem patterns itself after the speech of someone who meanderingly describes an escapist fantasy, rattling off thoughts as they come to mind. Of course, the poetic voice also emphasizes the refrain “Vou-me embora pra Pásargada” by repeating it four times throughout the body of the poem. This use of repetition causes the poem to sound more like the spontaneously spoken thoughts of Manuel Bandeira and less like written text. The poem “Cunhatã” provides more examples of emphatic or intensifying repetition:

Tinha uma cicatriz no meio da testa:

– Que foi isto, Siquê?

Com voz de detrás da garganta, a boquinha tuíra:

– Minha mãe (a madrasta) estava costurando

Disse vai ver se tem fogo

Eu soprei eu soprei eu soprei não vi fogo
Aí ela se levantou e esfregou com minha cabeça
na brasa

Riu, riu, riu

(Libertinagem 28)

This poem makes no attempt to hide its imitation of Brazilian speech as it recreates the colloquial mannerisms of the four-year-old Siquê, who repeats the phrase “eu soprei” three times, just like a child reiterating her words. In like manner, the repeated words, “Riu, riu, riu” make the poetic voice sound like an amusing raconteur, telling the story out loud. In addition to displaying intensifying repetition, this poem also features expressions that are common to everyday speech and less frequent in formal writing, such as the diminutive form “boquinha” and the verb “ter” in place of “haver” to express existence. The lack of punctuation in the speech of Siquê also mirrors oral language because, in spoken discourse, words are not isolated in connected speech (Ladefoged 107).

“O anjo da guarda,” Bandeira’s touching poem about his deceased sister, emanates not only from the poignant emotions of his heart, but also from the wandering thoughts of his mind. Notice how the poem uses not only paraphrasing, but also an interrupting clarification, represented by a parenthetical statement:

Quando minha irmã morreu,

(Devia ter sido assim)

Um anjo moreno, violento e bom

– brasileiro

Veio ficar ao pé de mim.

O meu anjo da guarda sorriu

E voltou para junto do Senhor.

(Libertinagem 12)

The parenthetical interjection “(Devia ter sido assim)” reads like a spontaneous addition made while speaking. Bandeira skillfully made this poem feel tremendously heartfelt and natural by carefully selecting these precise words. The poetic voice seems uncertain about the death of

his sister but slowly becomes more reassured of his own words as the short poem continues. The other interruption comes in the form of a dash – “brasileiro.” This one word seems to be a restatement or paraphrase of the previous line, “moreno, violento e bom.” The poet considers this word important enough to insert into the poem at the expense of fluidity and continuity. But the slightly jarring addition gives the poetry a much more natural and conversational tone and leads us to believe that this poem truly represents Bandeira’s feelings about the death of his beloved sister and is therefore not just an invention or contrivance for an imaginary poetic voice. Self-correction, another form of “oralidade” very similar to repetition and paraphrasing, appears in the poem, “Oração a Teresinha do Menino Jesus.” Self-correcting restatements appear much more frequently in recordings and transcriptions of spoken language than in written text because of the simple fact that, when writing, the author can change and edit text, thus removing all evidence that the author even made a mistake. But the interjected correction in this poem was intentional; it serves to represent the thoughts and speech of the poetic voice.

Me dá alegria! Me dá alegria,

Santa Teresa!...

Santa Teresa não, Teresinha...

Teresinha do Menino Jesus.

(Libertinagem 29)

The combination of repetition and self-correction give these lines a distinctly oral and colloquial tone that makes the evasive yet melancholy plea of the poetic voice all the more realistic and thought-provoking. It also facilitates our understanding of the connection between the poetic voice and Bandeira himself, who expressed similar feelings of discouragement coupled with hope.

Moreover, the sentence “Me dá alegria!” provides an excellent example of the common colloquial syntax of spoken Brazilian Portuguese, something rarely found in poetry before the advent of Brazilian Modernism. The word order of the sentence in question is unacceptable according to the standard prescriptive rules of Portuguese grammar, which require instead, “Dá-me alegria!” But, rather than opting to follow the normal guidelines for writing, Bandeira chooses to imitate the spoken language in order to more accurately represent the linguistic reality of the language of Brazil. This additional accuracy helps readers connect to the poem on a more personal level and embodies Bandeira’s beliefs about writing poetry and about communing with deity.

“Evocação do Recife” stands out as one of Bandeira’s best known poems; this is no coincidence since it also represents an excellent example of how his poetry can reflect spoken language. Gil Roberto Costa Negreiros aptly notes: Em “Evocação do Recife”, o próprio título nos remete ao ‘discurso memorial’, ilustrando pelos vários flashes do passado remoto do enunciador. As diversas recordações, que configuram a lembrança evocada, são nitidamente apresentadas como se o enunciador as pensasse ou as falasse, de forma natural e cotidiana.

(Negreiros 189) Negreiros goes on to point out how Bandeira uses pauses and unfilled gaps in this poem:

De repente

nos longes da noite

um sino

(quoted in Negreiros 189)

The type setting of these lines, which moves the words “um sino” away from the others, not only expresses the physical space between the poetic voice and the bell sounding in the distance, but also suggests a pause in the discourse of the poet who struggles to recall a faraway time long since passed. In addition to moving words apart using typography to create pauses in the words of the poetic voice, Bandeira also includes ellipses to help achieve this effect:

Atrás da casa ficava a Rua da Saudade...

...onde se ia fumar escondido

Do lado de lá era o cais da Rua da Aurora...

...onde se ia pescar escondido

(qtd. in Negreiros 190)

The parallelism caused by the repetition of words and structure in the above lines highlights the pause that appears in the middle of each sentence, creating a naturally flowing feeling of balance. “Evocação do Recife” also contains vocabulary in a way that neither Camões nor anyone writing in a strictly formal style today would employ:

A gente brincava no meio da rua

.....

Uma pessoa grande dizia:

Fogo em Santo Antônio!

(Libertinagem 23)

“A gente,” which is far more colloquial than the more traditional form of the first person plural, “nós,” is extremely common in speech, whereas “nós” is the preferred form in writing. Interestingly, the phrase “uma pessoa grande” is not only too informal for most forms of writing, but also represents the speech of a child recounting the episode of the fire. Once again, these

instances of colloquialisms blend the poetic voice with the author of the poem. In these lines, the poetic voice could very well represent Manuel Bandeira as a young boy who, in fact, did live in Recife as a child. The use of colloquial vocabulary serves to establish a firm link between Bandeira and his boyhood self.

Other lexical examples of how Bandeira's poetry exemplifies the speech of "local and regional idiolects" appear in almost all of his poems (Tapscott 11). Observe the following line from "Camelôs": "O macaquinho que trepa no coqueiro" (Libertinagem 14). Both "macaquinho" and "trepar" are more common in spoken language than in writing. Another example comes from "Porquinho-da-índia," where Bandeira uses Brazilian grammar and abbreviations: "Levava ele pra sala" (Libertinagem 26). In standard written Portuguese, it would have read "Levava-o para a sala." In *Libertinagem*, Bandeira also uses the words "bichinho," "cadê," and "licença" (meaning "com licença"). He even misspelled words or wrote out new words to faithfully recreate the way people actually speak, as in the poem "Mangue," for example: "O preto – Eu sou aquele preto principá do centro do cafange do fundo do rebolo. Quem sois tu?" (Libertinagem 20). These examples, and many more, demonstrate Bandeira's commitment to advancing the cause of modern spoken Portuguese in literature, and how he draws on experiences from his own life to compose poetry.

Bandeira broke another so-called rule by using the preposition "em" with verbs of motion, according to Luiz Carlos Lessa, in order to reflect the speech of the people (Bandeira and Landani 660). By employing "em" in place of "a," Bandeira causes the following example to closely resemble speech, rather than traditional written form: "Uma noite ele chegou no bar Vinte de Novembro" (qtd. in Bandeira and Landani 661). Many other abbreviations and colloquial terms appear in "Vou-me embora pra Pasárgada."

Vou-me embora pra Pasárgada

Em Pasárgada tem tudo É outra civilização

Tem um processo seguro

De impedir a concepção

Tem telefone automático

Tem alcalóide à vontade

Tem prostitutas bonitas

Para a gente namorar

(Bandeira, *Libertinagem* 36)

The very title of the poem reflects patterns of common speech by using "pra" in place of "para." Notice the repeated use of the verb "ter" in place of "haver" as well as "a gente" in place

of “nós.” The extensive usage of terms common in spoken language has the effect of making the lines of the poem feel more personal, natural, and conversational in contrast to many older styles of poetry. In the words of Luiz Carlos Lessa, Bandeira truly embraced:

o largo emprego de termos e expressões de cunho nitidamente popular, a ostensiva aceitação de sintaxes caracteristicamente brasileiras, e a louvável rejeição das lições de certos gramatiqueros maçantes, forjadores de regras e de regrinhas que não correspondem à realidade linguística.

(Bandeira and Landani 658)

Bandeira also uses rhetorical questions and simplified language to create the illusion of speech. In the book, *Manuel Bandeira de Corpo Inteiro*, Stefan Baciú points out how Bandeira uses a number of features characteristic of spoken language in the poem “Profundamente” to give it a very familial and human tone:

Hoje não ouço mais as vozes daquele tempo

Minha avóMeu avô

Totônio Rodrigues

Tomásia

Rosa

Onde estão todos eles?

—Estão todos dormindo

Estão todos deitados

Dormindo

Profundamente.

(*Libertinagem* 30)

Baciú points out how the poet asks questions like “Onde estão todos eles?” and answers them as if he were talking to himself (159). He repeats the same question and the same answer, first speaking about the past and then the present. The use of nicknames and familial forms of address like “Totônio” and “Tomásia” also make the poem seem conversational. Baciú also mentions the poem “Poema de Finados” from *Libertinagem* and how its simplistic language gives us a clear impression of the son visiting his father’s grave and the human feeling of sadness and bitterness that he feels (159). The plain vocabulary and un-ornamented syntax make the poetic voice sound like a child, as in several of Bandeira’s other poems. Even though this poem

has some rhyme and meter, the innocent tone and simple words give us the impression that the poem could not only express the ideas of a child, but could also even be spoken by a child. This strongly points to the conclusion that the poetic voice in the poem is Bandeira as a boy. It is no wonder that Manuel Bandeira ranks among the best-known Brazilian poets; he truly altered the poetic landscape in Brazil. In fact, his colleague and admirer Carlos Drummond de Andrade said, “Bandeira tinha uma variedade de interesses literários e foi um mestre em todas as formas de poesia. Assim, através de sua poesia, podemos, inclusive, entender melhor o percurso da própria poesia brasileira” (Carvalho e Silva 5). Indeed, Bandeira’s use of “oralidade” causes his stirring verses to evoke images of places around the globe and within his imagination, capture the beauty and the humor of the quotidian, and examine love, death, and their interconnectivity (Baciu 145). Although not all of his poems can be said to truly mimic speech, this characteristic nonetheless stands out as one of Bandeira’s most distinguishing accomplishments, among so many. He truly loved the language of Brazil and advocated its acceptance in literary circles. By making his poems sound like spoken language, Bandeira created autobiographical poems that withstand the tests of time:

A vida não me chegava pelos jornais nem pelos livros

Vinha da boca do povo na língua errada do povo

Língua certa do povo

Porque ele é que fala gostoso o português do Brasil.

(Libertinagem 23)

Works Cited

- Baciu, Stefan. Manuel Bandeira de Corpo Inteiro. Rio De Janeiro: J. Olympio, 1966. Print.
- Bandeira, Manuel, and Giulia Landani. Libertinagem ; Estrela da Manhã : Edição Crítica. Madrid: ALLCA XX, 1998. Print.
- Bandeira, Manuel, and Godofredo de Oliveira Neto. Libertinagem e Estrela da Manhã. Rio de Janeiro: Nova Fronteira, 2006. Print.
- Carvalho e Silva, Maximiano de, comp. Homenagem a Manuel Bandeira: 1986 – 1988; Coletânea de Poemas, Depoimentos e Estudos Especiais, Comemorativa do Centenário do Poeta (*Recife, 19/4/1886) e dos Vinte Anos do Seu Falecimento. Rio De Janeiro [Niterói, RJ]: UFF, Sociedade Sousa da Silveira 1989. Print.
- Ladefoged, Peter. A Course in Phonetics. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 2006. Print.
- Manuel, Bandeira. Manuel Bandeira: Seleta em Prosa. Rio De Janeiro: Nova Fronteira, 1997. Print.
- Moraes, Emanuel De. Manuel Bandeira; Análise e Interpretação Literária. Rio De Janeiro: J. Olympio, 1962. Print.
- Negreiros, Gil Roberto Costa. Marcas de Oralidade na Poesia de Manuel Bandeira. São Paulo: Editora Paulistana, 2009. Print.
- Tapscott, Stephen. Twentieth-century Latin American Poetry: a Bilingual Anthology. Austin: University of Texas, 1996. Print.
- Williams, Frederick G. Poets of Brazil: a Bilingual Selection. New York: Luso-Brazilian, 2004. Print.