

# THE BELOIT POETRY JOURNAL

Volume 10 - Number 1

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## THE RETURN

We cross the bridge, the town is near ahead,  
A patch of green against monotony  
Of everlasting clay, against the old  
A mend of new cloth; the steeple high  
Penciled above it points like the finger  
Of a compass to the heart of town.

It has changed, years have made shorter  
The blocks I walked to school. Our house is gone,  
Dormered windows and white columned porch  
Have been replaced with metal casings and pink  
Brick and since a year ago last March  
It holds a rest home for the aged. I think

The young have moved from town. Only the river  
Flows unchanged through sloping banks of red;  
Unchanged, it changes with the seasons. Summer  
Slows its flow, warms it to tepid,  
It lulls the catfish into lazy sleep  
While the water moccasins grow  
Vigorous with the heat. On a slope  
At Big Jake Crossing, forty years ago

This summer the Washita was spanned, a bridge  
Connected bank to bank; the schism was healed  
That had, as surely as a mountain ridge,  
Divided our county. My father had observed  
Through all his dreaming years, an orchard rare  
As a waterfall in this prairie land,  
Growing a river width away; that year  
He rode across the bridge to pick a bride.

One winter, so near the Washita that river  
Bottom poplars dropped their leaves on

Shingles of our frosted roof, my mother  
Bore me, while poplars stood stripped of green,  
Their long smoky limbs bare; and nuzzling  
Its seed under bark, the mistletoe  
Reached down its parasitic roots draining  
Their sap. The river almost stopped its flow.

Spring swells it to bursting. I have seen  
It overflow its shallow banks, carrying  
Trees upended, all their long roots showing  
Brown, while chunks of red mud still hold on.  
It carried carcasses of pigs; I see  
In nightmares yet, dead bodies thumping.  
Receding to clear itself of flood debris  
It runs cool and clean, good for swimming.

Around the bend from Big Jake where the bed  
Flattens and the water forms a quiet  
Pool, a month before the harvest of wheat  
I stood in a white-clothed queue hearing the words  
"Im Namen des Vaters des Sohnes und  
Des Heiligen Geistes" until I heard them said

For me. Baptised, I scrambled drenched and clay  
Stained to the bank, while the mocking-bird  
Intruded its mimicry into the words  
The congregation sang, "Gott ist die Liebe."  
I was fifteen, I parroted the song  
Wondering how I looked with my hair dripping.

This fall the same as others, the river runs  
Red. Lined along its banks the poplars  
Drop their leaves, the mistletoe gains lustre,  
Virginia creeper frost-shocked to crimson  
Holds its beauty one day before wind  
Severs each leaf from the mother-vine.

**Ruth Reimer Duke**

## IF DELIGHT BE SEVERED

1. If old delight be severed from  
 the leg that stamps, the toes  
 that tingle,  
 And all the tigers of the tanze  
 like troubadours are turned  
 to where those kingships mingle  
 Their praise for dying empires,  
 their love of pomp  
 with ladies in state chambers,  
 And like a trompe  
 the song is made mechanically  
 by falling matter;

If the ladies make their curtsies,  
 commence their chatter,  
 turn their powdered heads to view  
 The poet and the dance,  
 slowly nodding to the room,  
 and then they say:  
 "How interesting, that poet!  
 His song is interesting!  
 That dance . . ." but  
 Their eyes are called away  
 from the minuet,  
 the kermis and the cod,  
 (that is; the codpiece, but also see  
 OTHELLO, II, i, line 156,  
 and Iago, variously)  
 While kings and ladies and  
 the unacknowledged God  
 goes by chance.  
 And thus Romance.

2. Yes, Molly! and thus Romance

is your ambivalence;  
 it makes the only sense  
 When other sense has fled:  
 long for a wise man  
 but love a fool;  
 There's a handy tool to screw  
 an empty head  
 towards Eternity.

Or take Bob Newton, who  
 reads Renaissance so well  
 we would scarcely recognize this hell,  
 Needed we not Hell so much the more  
 than Newton's Marvelous whore,  
 and had therefore geared Babylon  
 So precisely  
 that every life  
 could know death nicely.

3. Oh, Yeats! I'm done; since  
 no more of those Irish joys.  
 Since Ellen Glasgow wrote  
 "An honorable end is the one thing  
 that cannot be taken  
 away from man,"  
 Clearly it can be taken from the boys.  
 Now no more attempts  
 to separate  
 The dancer from the dance:  
 it's accomplished:  
 the name's Romance,  
 And what was three  
 will no longer be  
 rolled into one.

Oh Yeats! Damn Ecstasy, I'm done!

James Hiner

## ELIAS HICKS IS A HERETIC

"Country friends come to defy us!"  
the Spielman said. "Yet all, we all stand or fall  
on the Old Christ creed. Light of us all  
and towered in His teaching.

What's this new preaching? Can words take His  
place?  
Elias? No, I don't remember your face  
—but you speak unregenerate Saul.  
The silence is grace that you spoil.  
You darken the meeting."

"I am His seed," said Elias.

"Firm is the Cleft-rock of the Christ!"  
the Spielman thundered. "Your teaching descends,  
your words are graven. Your farmer friends  
bend to the weather, but God intends  
absolute values. You buy, sell. But God has priced  
by no almanac casting of markets and crops.

Hide in the Rock. Read firmly. No Christ-word  
drops  
in nature's uncertainty."

"Seed must be sown," said Elias.

"All—or nothing! Quell your disquiet!"  
the Spielman ranted. "Between us and God's wrath,  
Christ is fortress. He *must* intercede.  
Blood is on us. By His blood we are freed:  
His is the power.

O do not deny us  
assurance unfaltering, for steep is the path!  
It is He who redeems, not the inner light.  
Be strong in the Rock."

"The seed will root," said Elias.

Sam Bradley

## VERSES FOR MY WIFE

St. Valentine's Day, 1959

You are still la belle—  
despite the insidious years  
corrosive of wonder, of all  
surprise, despite the scars  
of too many breakfasts,  
too many cocktails,  
consumed in silence, the waste  
of small talk, the dull  
surmise about who  
said what, the price  
for that, the anyhow  
too often commonplace  
invasions of solitude  
or companionship —  
when tired minds confide  
our tiredness, perhaps  
our boredom with the selves  
we have permitted time  
to make us, and all resolve  
sickens, all becomes  
empty gesture, two  
actors playing poor  
parts poorly and so  
denying what we are.  
Still, you are la belle,  
more than wife or friend,  
more than my mind or will  
affirms, more than my hands  
can touch—half dream,

half vision perhaps,  
intangible as a name  
which somehow escapes  
the tongue. Still, you are  
what I never quite  
possess, however near  
when in the absolute  
and desperate dark I face  
your naked flesh—in lust,  
in furious tenderness,  
in sudden hope, at last  
in rage which coldly lets  
our bodies' transport, then  
disjunct and separate,  
twist and writhe between  
ourselves, as if the rack  
whereon our bodies strain  
yet might force or trick  
the self beneath the skin.  
Still, la belle, you are  
la belle, inviolate  
and whole, yourself entire,  
more than daylight  
reveals, if something less  
than dreams. I turn again  
and again to this, this  
something more than—  
whatever it is it is.  
I turn, certainly not  
compelled by legalities  
or pity (that substitute  
for love) or habit's itch.

Not for these I try  
 to stifle the selves I watch  
 myself become when now  
 another's voice or glance  
 may strike a note unstruck  
 by you or struck but once  
 or twice. No, awake  
 and uncompelled, I turn  
 half dazzled, half  
 resigned to what was born  
 with you—my present self.

E. P. Bollier

PLATO, ESQ.

Dear sir: I am but one of many  
 That waste your treasures bright and bonny,  
 Yet thank you most for that one penny  
     So didascallic:  
 Expulsion without ceremony  
     From your Republic.

I know, you settled all poor rhetors  
 Long since for mixing with our betters  
 And poking into sundry matters  
     Where we'd no business;  
 The Ideal Form, you said, would get us  
     Where we sought is-ness.

But see, we've such a deal of sense  
 Tingling in circumambience  
 That silence were the base offense  
     To simple being.  
 Simple? Aie, we make no pretence  
     To be all-seeing.

Maybe we *would* have hurt your wards,  
Or some of us. A choice of bards  
Is none or all: If you use swords  
                                    For your gymnastics  
You may get cut, and so with words—  
                                    Odes and acrostics.

Beyond this, you aim at that level  
Of goodness where men cast the devil  
Out of their hearts, as you might stifle  
                                    Your inborn poet.  
But who in ignorance of evil  
                                    Could ever do it?

Is this then where we play our part,  
Analyzing your inmost heart  
To show it all? For such is art;  
                                    And such our thesis:  
Just useful wisdom for a start  
                                    In anamnesis.

We're out. But we've the better of it,  
Master, not just because we covet  
The chance to sing, though some approve it  
                                    And most demand it;  
But flesh and blood is all our profit—  
                                    We couldn't stand it.

Where shall we start but with this body,  
This scrap of mind with which to study  
The separate senses, sweet and bawdy,  
                                    To find fulfillment?  
Granted, free souls are not so tidy  
                                    As in concealment.

A man—is it not so?—is lost  
In launching, on strange currents tossed  
All topsy-turvy. Yet we trust  
                                    We shall discover

What must be, sailing as we must  
 And wheresoever.

Love, you rejoin, conducts to knowledge.  
 Ah, that's the talk will give us courage:  
 Lord Eros sets up keeping college  
 To educate us.

Who fails to know in that near image  
 The real afflatus?

But next you hint we must make quorum  
 Among ourselves! a sterile forum,  
 "Pure" youths to bait a spectral theorem,  
 Bread on the waters;  
 Sir, take the sons, you're welcome to 'em,  
 Give us the daughters.

You pose a realm of pure idea,  
 Of phantom form, like Mother Gaea  
 Subsuming Molly by aporrhoea  
 In cosy Dublin,  
 So Moll, becoming, might yet be a  
 Decent hobgoblin.

Sir, words and girls both run to ruin  
 If left alone, it's their undoin'  
 And yours, I fear—*Republic, Ion,*  
 Dear twittle-twattle.  
 Being in form? That's use, that's screwin'  
 (See Aristotle).

You stick yourself, sir. Who discerns  
 That *hupsos*—phrase and image—learns  
 Partly why one clodhopper turns  
 Here to address ye  
 I' the crambo-clink o' Robin Burns,  
 An' sae God bless ye.

**Hayden Carruth**

# THREE BRAZILIAN POETS

## Introduction

In Rio de Janeiro today live three of the finest modern poets in the Western World: Manuel Bandeira (b. 1886), Cecilia Meireles (b. 1901), and Carlos Drummond de Andrade (b. 1902).

Manuel Bandeira, of whom Vinicius de Moraes (author of the prize-winning *ORFEU NEGRO* at the 1959 Cannes Film Festival) has said: "You were a star in my exile"—is the permanent secretary of the Brazilian Academy, close friend of Mexican poet Alfonso Reyes, and the most important voice in the first phase of Brazilian Modernism. Professor of his nation's literature at the University of Brazil, haunter of the bookstores in Rio, Bandeira speaks with the greatest critical authority to his countrymen. His age, his prestige, his immense impact upon Brazilian letters over the past forty years—all make Manuel Bandeira the T. S. Eliot of Portuguese America.

Cecilia Meireles, beautiful and gracious wife of Heitor Grillo, is the best woman poet in the Portuguese language. Close friend of the late Chilean Nobel Prize winner Gabriela Mistral, twice nominated for the Nobel Prize herself, held in very high esteem in South America, in the Latin countries of Europe, and in India—Cecilia Meireles, in the words of Bandeira, is not a poetess, but a great poet: worthy peer of Bandeira himself and of Carlos Drummond. The most independent of all Brazilian poets, Cecilia Meireles has fashioned her own world of art apart from the impact of the revolution into Modernism; at her best, she creates that kind of poetic hypnosis associated with John Keats.

Carlos Drummond de Andrade, idol of young Brazilian poets and intellectuals, is the most important voice in the second phase of Brazilian Modernism. He is the high priest of the socio-political poetry that started flowing in 1930. An expert archivist in the Ministry of Education, Drummond makes his influence felt in several critical articles a week on any and all subjects that he feels demand his attention. At present writing new poems for his grandchildren, Carlos Drummond de Andrade, in the opinion of many of Brazil's leading literati, is perhaps the most intelligent and compassionate poet on this vast half-continent.

I wish to thank Antonio Candido de Melo e Souza, Decio de Almeida Prado, and Ruy Coelho for their help in selecting some of these poems for translation for THE BELOIT POETRY JOURNAL; the poets themselves for reading the translations for any possible misinterpretations; Joao Fonseca, who helped me translate from Bandeira; and above all, Yolanda Leite, who has worked with me constantly until a project on three poets has turned into one on fifteen.

John Nist

Sao Paulo, Brazil  
4 July 1959

**SEVEN POEMS BY MANUEL BANDEIRA**  
**Translated by John Nist**

**Pneumothorax**

Fever, lung-coughing blood, gasping, and night-sweats.

A whole life that could have been, but was not.  
Cough, cough, cough.

He sent for the doctor:

—Say thirty-three.

—Thirty-three . . . thirty-three . . . thirty-three . . .

—Breathe.

.....

—You have a hole in the left lung and seepage into the right.

—Well, doctor, isn't it possible to try a pneumothorax?

—No. The only thing you can do is play an Argentine tango.

**Absolute Death**

To die.  
To die body and soul.  
Completely.

To die without leaving the sad remains of flesh,  
Without leaving the bloodless mask of wax,  
Surrounded by flowers,  
Which will rot away—so happy!—one day,  
Bathed in tears  
Born less from grief than from the shock of death.

To die without leaving perhaps even a pilgrim soul . . .  
On the way to heaven?  
But what heaven can fulfill your dream of heaven?

To die without leaving a furrow, a trace, a shadow,  
Without leaving even the remembrance of a shadow  
In any human heart, in any human thought,  
In any human skin.

To die so completely  
That one day when somebody sees your name on a  
page  
He will ask: "Who was he? . . ."  
To die still more completely:  
Without leaving even this name.

**Apple**

From one angle I see you just like a dried-up breast  
From another just like a belly from whose navel  
still hangs the umbilical cord

You are red as the divine love

Inside you in the little seeds  
Palpitates a prodigious life  
Infinitely

And you remain so simple  
Beside a knife  
In a poor hotel room.

### Roundel of the Little Horses

The little horses running,  
And we, the big horses, eating . . .  
And your beauty, Esmeralda,  
Finally drove me mad.

The little horses running,  
And we, the big horses, eating . . .  
And the sun outside so bright,  
But in my heart night is falling.

The little horses running,  
And we, the big horses, eating . . .  
Alfonso Reyes going away,  
And so many people staying behind.

The little horses running,  
And we, the big horses, eating . . .  
Italy bragging and bullying,  
And Europe coming apart at the seams . . .

The little horses running,  
And we, the big horses, eating . . .  
Brazil busy politicking,  
My God! Poetry dying . . .  
And the sun outside so bright,  
And the sun so bright, Esmeralda,  
But in my heart—night is falling!

**Poetica**

I am sick of limited lyricism  
Of well-behaved lyricism  
Of public-servant lyricism  
With its time-clock card  
And its clerkly protocol  
And its ass-kissing flattery of the boss.

I am sick of halting lyricism  
That has to look up in the dictionary  
The vernacular meaning of a word.

Down with the purists!

I want all the words  
Chiefly the universal barbarisms  
I want all the constructions  
Chiefly the syntactical ones of exception  
I want all the rhythms  
Chiefly the unnumbered.

I am sick of flirting lyricism  
Of political lyricism  
Of rickety lyricism  
Of syphilitic lyricism  
Of all lyricism which surrenders  
To anything which is not its true self.

After all, that is not lyricism  
That is only bookkeeping  
A table of co-sines  
A handbook for the perfect lover  
With a hundred models of letters  
And the different ways to please the ladies.

I prefer the lyricism of madmen  
The lyricism of drunkards  
The difficult and poignant lyricism of drunkards  
The lyricism of Shakespeare's fools.

I will have nothing more to do  
With a lyricism which is not freedom.

### **I am Going Away to Pasargada**

I am going away to Pasargada  
There I am friend of the king  
There I have the woman I want  
On the bed that I shall choose  
I am going away to Pasargada.

I am going away to Pasargada  
Here I am not happy  
There life is an adventure  
In such a non-mattering way  
There life is an adventure  
That Joan the Mad Woman of Spain  
Queen and pretended insane  
Is relative once removed  
From the daughter-in-law I never had.

And how I will exercise!  
I will pedal the bicycle!  
I will ride the wild ass!  
I will climb the greased pole!  
I will bathe in the sea!  
And when I am tired  
I will lie on the banks of the river  
And call the nymph of the water  
To tell me the stories  
That Rose used to tell me  
When I was a boy  
I am going away to Pasargada.

There's everything in Pasargada  
It's another civilization:

It has a safe and sure way  
To prevent knocking the girls up  
It has automatic telephone  
It has plenty of dope  
It has beautiful prostitutes  
For one to make love to.

And when I become sadder  
So sad that I have no more hope  
And when in the night it comes  
The desire to kill myself  
—Ah, there I am friend of the king—  
Then I have the woman I want  
On the bed that I shall choose  
I am going away to Pasargada.

### **Last Song of the Dead End**

Dead End which I sang in a couplet  
Full of mental ellipses,  
Dead End of my sorrows,  
Of my doubts and my fears  
(But also of my loves,  
Of my kisses, of my dreams),  
Goodbye, goodbye forever!

They are going to tear down this house,  
But my room will remain,  
Not like an imperfect form  
In this world of appearances:  
It will remain in eternity,  
With its books, with its pictures,  
Intact, suspended in air!

Dead End of the evergreen thorn,  
Of the passions with no tomorrows,

How much Mediterranean light  
Did not the dew of the wee hours  
Did not the purity of the mornings  
Harvest upon these stones  
With the shining of adolescence!

Dead End of my sorrows,  
I am not ashamed of you!  
Were you a street of the whores?  
They are all daughters of God!  
And before them there were the nuns . . .  
And you belonged to the poor only  
When, poor myself, I came to live here.

Lapa—Lapa do Desterro—,  
Lapa which sins so much!  
(But when six o'clock strikes,  
In the first voice of the bells,  
What angelic graces you have:  
Like in that voice which announced  
To Mary the conception of Christ!)

Our Lady of Carmel,  
There from the height of the altar,  
Is begging for alms for the poor—  
For all the sad women,  
For all the black women,  
Who come at night to seek shelter  
In the doorways of the church.

Dead End born in the shadows  
Of the stone walls of convents,  
You are life, life which is holy  
No matter how many its falls.  
For this I love you always,  
And I sing to you to say:  
Goodbye, goodbye forever!

**Manuel Bandeira**

**NINE POEMS BY CECILIA MEIRELES**

**Translated by John Nist**

**Introduction**

Here is my life:  
This sand so clear  
With drawings that walk  
Dedicated to the wind . . .

Here is my voice:  
This empty shell  
The shadow of a sound  
Preserving its own lament . . .

Here is my grief:  
This broken coral  
Surviving its pathetic moment . . .

Here is my heritage:  
This solitary sea—  
On one side it was love  
And on the other forgetfulness.

**Portrait**

I did not have this face of today  
So calm  
So sad  
So thin.

Nor these eyes so empty  
Nor this bitter mouth.

I did not have these strengthless hands  
So still  
And cold  
And dead.

I did not have this heart  
That does not even show itself.

I did not realize this change  
So simple  
So certain  
So easy.

In what mirror did I lose my face?

### **Motive**

I sing because the moment exists  
And my life is complete.  
I am not gay, I am not sad:  
I am a poet.

Brother of fugitive things,  
I feel no delight or torment.  
I cross nights and days  
In the wind.

Whether I destroy or build,  
Whether I persist or disperse,  
—I don't know, I don't know.  
I don't know if I stay or go.

I know that I sing.  
The song is everything.  
The rhythmic wing has eternal blood,  
And I know that one day I shall be dumb:  
—Nothing more.

**Guitar**

Silver dagger you were,  
Silver dagger!  
It was not you who made  
Such a fool of my hand.

I saw you shining among stones,  
Silver dagger!  
On your handle, blooming flowers,  
On your blade, the exact measure,

The exact, the precise measure,  
Silver dagger,  
To cut through to my heart  
With an initial and a date.

The greatest pain I have,  
Silver dagger,  
Is not to see me dying,  
But to know who is killing me.

**The Roosters Will Crow**

The roosters will crow when we die,  
And a soft breeze, with delicate hands,  
Will touch the fringes, the silken  
Shrouds.

And the sleep of night will cloud  
The clear windows.

And the crickets, far off, will saw silences:  
Stalks of crystal, cold long solitudes,  
And the enormous perfume of trees.

Ah, what sweet moon will look upon our calm face,

Even yet more calm than her great mirror  
Of silver.

What thick freshness upon our hair,  
As free as the fields at sunrise.

From the mist of dawn,  
One last star  
Will ascend: pale.

What immense peace, without human voice,  
Without the lip of wolfish faces,  
Without hatred, without love, without anything!

Like dark lost prophets,  
Only the dogs will talk through the valleys.  
Strong questions. Vast pauses.

We shall lie in death  
In that soft contour  
Of a shell in the water.

### Pastoral

Here is the tiny shepherd,  
much smaller than his flock,  
watching, timid and careful,  
the sunset in the field,  
hugging the little lamb  
like a brother his own size.

His eyes are, in the silence,  
more than a shepherd's—a saint's.

The blue and green horizon  
is turning violet and red,  
and all the clouds disappear,

and a star comes on  
—to take away that boy  
who is leading his flock.

### Museum

Since the lords are already dead  
and cannot fight any more,  
their armored plates, with regret,  
have sat them down to the game.

On the chessboard there the horses,  
the towers, the soldiers, the king . . . A hand  
of iron can almost reach to play;  
it lacks only the articulation.

O briefly squared plain  
of the chessboard!  
Visors lonesome for blood,  
for wars which time has undone.

O unsatisfied ghosts  
of the lords who are no more!  
How much of death, without wars,  
you, beyond all wars, now engage!

### The Archangel

The voice of the Archangel falls.

(From the top of colored towers,  
among arrows and stained windows;  
from the top of minarets; from the top  
of Gothic steeples; from the height

of curved domes; from the fine  
 Golden Crescent; from the large  
 baroque belfries; from these  
 cold jesuitical triangles;  
 from the arms of the crosses; from the clouds,  
 from the trees, from the jet of water,  
 from the doves' wings, from the little  
 corolla of the frail anemone . . .)

The voice of the invisible Archangel falls.  
 Lonesome.  
 Solitary.

(Tell me if you have ever heard it,  
 thus: far off, full of sorrow, centuries old.)

### **The Gates of Midnight**

The angels come to open the gates of midnight,  
 at that very moment when sleep is deepest  
 and silence most pervasive.

The gates wheel open and unexpectedly we sigh.

The angels come with their golden music,  
 their tunics billowing with celestial breezes,  
 and they sing in their fluid incomprehensible tongue.

Then the trees burst forth with blossoms and fruit,  
 the moon and the sun intertwine their beams,  
 the rainbow unwinds its ribbons  
 and all the animals appear,  
 mingled with the stars.

The angels come to open the gates of midnight.  
 And we understand that there is no more time,

that this is the last vision,  
that our hands are already lifted for goodbyes,  
that our feet at last are freed from the earth,  
freed for that flight, announced and dreamed  
since the beginning of births.

The angels extend us their divine invitations.  
And we dream that we are no longer dreaming.

Cecilia Meireles

## EIGHT POEMS BY CARLOS DRUMMOND

Translated by John Nist

### Pathetic Poem

What kind of noise is that on the stairs?  
It is love coming to an end,  
It is the man who closed the door  
And hanged himself in the curtains.

What kind of noise is that on the stairs?  
It is Guiomar who covered her eyes  
And blew her nose fortissimo.  
It is the still moon upon the plates  
And the cutlery shining in the pantry.

What kind of noise is that on the stairs?  
It is the dripping of the water faucet,  
It is the inaudible lament  
Of someone who has lost his gamble

While the music of the band  
Goes down, down, down.

What kind of noise is that on the stairs?  
It is the virgin with a trombone,  
The child with a drum,  
The bishop with a bell,  
And someone who pianissimos the noise  
Which jumps from my heart.

### Secret

You cannot communicate poetry.  
Keep still in your corner.  
Do not love.

I hear that there is shooting  
Within reach of our body.  
Is it a revolution? is it love?  
Say nothing.

Everything is possible, only I am impossible.  
The sea overflows with fish.  
There are men who walk on the sea  
As though they walked in the street.  
Do not tell.

Suppose that an angel of fire  
Swept the face of the earth  
And the sacrificed men  
Asked for mercy.  
Beg nothing.

**Sadness in Heaven**

In heaven also there is a melancholy hour.  
A difficult hour, when doubt invades the souls.  
Why did I make the world? God wonders  
And answers: I do not know.

The angels look at Him in disapproval.  
Their feathers fall.

All the hypotheses: grace, eternity, love  
Fall. They are feathers.

One feather more, and heaven is undone.  
So quiet, no breaking noise tells  
The moment between everything and nothing.  
That is to say, the sadness of God.

**The Ox**

O solitude of the ox in the field,  
O solitude of man in the street!  
Amid cars, trains, telephones,  
Amid screams, the profound aloneness.

O solitude of the ox in the field,  
O millions suffering without a curse!  
Whether it is night or day makes no difference,  
Darkness breaks up with the dawn.

O solitude of the ox in the field,  
Men writhing without a word!  
The city cannot be explained  
And the houses have no meaning.

O solitude of the ox in the field!  
The ghost ship passes  
Silently through the crowded street.

If a love storm should blow up!  
The hands clasped, the life saved . . .  
But the weather is steady. The ox is alone.  
In the immense field: the oil derrick.

### The Dirty Hand

My hand is dirty.  
I must cut it off.  
Useless to wash it.  
The water is rotten.  
Or to soap it.  
The soap is no good.  
The hand has been dirty  
For many many years.

At first hidden  
In the pocket of my trousers,  
Who would know it?  
People used to call me,  
Offering me their hand.  
Hard, I refused.  
The hidden hand  
Would spread its dark  
Track through my body.  
And I saw it was the same  
To use it or put it away.  
The disgust was the same.

Ah, how many nights  
Way back in my house  
I washed this hand,  
I scrubbed it, I scoured it!  
For greater contrast,  
I wished I could turn it

Into crystal or diamond,  
Or even, at last,  
Into a simple white hand,  
The clean hand of a man,  
Which you could hold  
And lift to your lips  
Or clasp in your own  
In one of those moments  
When two people confess  
Without saying a word . . .  
The incurable hand  
Opened its dirty fingers.

It was a filthy dirt,  
Not dirt of earth,  
Not dirt of coal,  
Not dirt of a scab,  
Not sweat of a shirt  
Of one who has worked.  
It was a sad dirt  
Made from disease  
And from mortal anguish  
In the disgusted skin.  
It was not black dirt—  
The black so pure  
In a white thing.  
It was gray-brown dirt,  
Gray-brown, dull, thistle.

Useless to keep  
The ignoble dirty hand  
Lying upon the table.  
Quick, cut it off,  
Cut it into pieces  
And throw it into the sea!  
With time, with hope  
And its machinery,  
Another hand will come,

Pure—transparent—,  
And fasten itself to my arm.

### Search for Poetry

Do not make verses about happenings.  
For poetry there is no creation or death.  
In her eyes, life is an unmoving sun,  
Which neither warms nor lights.  
The attractions, the anniversaries, the personal incidents do not matter.

Do not make poetry with the body.  
This excellent, complete and comfortable body, so unfit for lyrical flow.

Your drop of gall, your face-making of pleasure  
or of pain in the dark

Are of no account.

Do not tell me your feelings,  
Which capitalize on ambiguity and attempt the long journey.

What you think and feel, that is not yet poetry.

Do not sing your city, leave it alone.

The song is not the movement of the machines or  
the secret of the houses.

It is not music heard in passing; nor the sound of  
the sea in the streets near the edge of spume.

The song is not nature

Or men in society.

For it, rain and night, fatigue and hope mean nothing.

Poetry (do not make poetry out of things)

Eliminates subject and object.

Do not dramatize, do not invoke,

Do not investigate. Do not waste time telling lies.

Do not be anxious.

Your ivory yacht, your diamond shoe,  
Your mazurkas and superstitions, your family skeletons  
Disappear in the curve of time, they are worthless.

Do not resurrect  
Your buried and melancholy childhood.  
Do not oscillate between the mirror  
And your fading memory.  
If it faded, it was not poetry.  
If it broke, it was not crystal.

Penetrate deftly the kingdom of words:  
Here lie the poems that wait to be written.  
They are paralyzed, but not in despair,  
All is calm and freshness on the untouched surface.  
Here they are alone and dumb, in the state of  
the dictionary.

Before you write them, live with your poems.  
If they are obscure, be patient. If they provoke you,  
hold your temper.

Wait for each one to actualize and to consume itself  
In the power of language  
And the power of silence.  
Do not force the poem to come out of Limbo.  
Do not pick from the ground the poem that was lost.  
Do not flatter the poem. Accept it  
As it will accept its own form, final and concentrated  
In space.

Come closer and contemplate the words.  
Each one  
Has a thousand secret faces under a neutral face  
And asks you, without interest in the answer,  
Poor or terrible, which you will give it:  
Have you brought the key?

Please note:  
Barren of melody and meaning,

The words have taken refuge in the night.  
 Still humid and saturated with sleep,  
 They roll in a difficult river and turn themselves  
 into despising.

### Dawn

The poet was drunk in a streetcar.  
 Day was dawning behind the backyards.  
 The gay boarding houses were sleeping most sadly.  
 The houses also were drunk.

Everything was beyond repair.  
 Nobody knew the world was going to end  
 (Only a child guessed it but kept silent),  
 That the world was going to end at 7:45.  
 Last thoughts! final telegrams!  
 Joseph, who had mastered his pronouns,  
 Helen, who loved men,  
 Sebastian, who was bankrupting himself,  
 Arthur, who said nothing,  
 Set sail for eternity.

The poet is drunk, but  
 He listens to an invitation in the dawn:  
 Shall we all go dancing  
 Between the streetcar and the tree?

Between the streetcar and the tree  
 Dance, my brothers!  
 Although there is no music  
 Dance, my brothers!

Children are being born  
 With such spontaneity.  
 How marvelous is love  
 (Love and other products).

Dance, my brothers!  
Death will come later,  
Like a sacrament.

### Aspiration

I do not want any longer the maternal adoration  
Which finally exhausts us and then flashes in panic,  
Neither do I want the feeling of a precious find  
Like that of Katherine Kippenburg at the feet of  
Rilke.

And I do not want the love, under silly disguises,  
Of that same nymph desolate in her hermitage,  
Nor the constant search of thirst rather than of  
lymph,

And neither do I want the simple rose of sex,

Hidden, meaningless, in the hostels of the wind,  
Just as I do not want the geometric friendship  
Of souls who elected one another in a proud cultivation,

An overlapping, perhaps? of melancholy needs.

I aspire rather to a faithful indifference  
But poised enough to sustain life  
And, in its indiscrimination of cruelty and diamond,  
Able to suggest the end without the injustice of  
prizes.

Carlos Drummond

## ABEL

## A Masque in a Kaleidoscope

## Fyrst a songe of Abell

I only came up from the country  
To spend a couple of nights;  
Now I've been here for almost a year,  
Waiting my last rites.

## Here takyt Abell hys wey bynethe the cytee

In the shrouding mist  
The chilly buildings  
Scrape the cocaine sky  
Like icebergs. I  
Watch them float,  
Remote, listing  
First to starboard  
Then to port.

Halfway down the subway stairs  
I pass a face  
I recognize.  
It winks.  
Cain, I cry.  
My invocation  
Rattles underground;  
He disappears in light.

The rumpled parchment ghosts  
Burrowing electrified  
Beneath the asphalt  
Are formally arranged  
Like mortuary flowers.

Downtown  
The ashen buildings

Lean sepulchral  
And akimbo  
Against the cinder sun.

### A songe of Abell

The macadam is hard  
In every back yard;  
How do they bury their dead?  
  
Do they use a jackhammer  
Or an iron sledgehammer;  
How do they bury their dead?  
  
God, the gravedigger's pay  
Must be three bucks a day;  
How do they bury their dead?

### Here entyr Abell to the theatre

I slouch in popcorn darkness  
Waiting for the cock to crow  
And history to start anew.  
  
Soon the latest revolution  
Spills black blood  
And water skiers schuss the Everglades:  
Some president ascends a rostrum,  
A doberman wins best of show.  
  
Then I slouch again  
To nod while paranoids  
Escape San Quentin,  
To doze away the trials  
Of ginghamed Emmy Lou,  
Waiting for the cock to crow  
And history to start anew.

**A songe of Abell**

If you can't spare a dollar, how bout a lousy  
dime;

If you can't spare a dollar, how bout a lousy  
dime;

She closes at three-thirty; that don't give me  
much time.

Baby, hear me knocking; come on let me in;  
Baby, hear me knocking; come on let me in;  
If you let me in this one time, I won't come back  
again.

There ain't a damn tree standing in this whole  
lonesome town;

There ain't a damn tree standing in this whole  
lonesome town;

Take your hachet, Baby, and chop my cherry  
tree down.

**Here goth Abell to a fayre**

The carrousel is reeling,  
Everything is going round and round.  
My wooden horse  
Plunges like a centaur  
To the wild calliope.

Here for chocolate cherries  
I slaughter flocks of leaden ducks  
Clanking iron orbits on enamel ponds.  
And here, for grinning kewpie dolls  
I smash up brittle crockery  
With sawdust dimestore balls.

I clump inside a maze of mirrors  
On foreshortened stumps.  
My arms elongate and distend.

A barker's cry, rasping  
 Through the cardboard walls  
 Hawks The Human Torso,  
 Marie, who swallows flaming swords,  
 The fatman and the midget, man and wife.

In her oracular tent,  
 Madam Lafarge,  
 Girdled by the zodiac,  
 Consults the stars,  
 Traces the lifeline of my palm,  
 Peers into her crystal ball.  
 She conjures up dark ladies  
 And prophesies an ocean voyage.

The girdered ferris wheel  
 Skeletons above the crowd.  
 The steel cage rolls me up and up  
 And I go over and around  
 To hang in nowhere  
 Dangling over nothing.

### The songe of Cayns woman

I am the Madam of Bedlam,  
 Her Highness, Madam Brocade;  
 I rent on the lay away basis,  
 And do a flourishing trade.

Sing, *Tenderloin, tenderloin*

Duncan Hines has approved me  
 So all my ladies are staid;  
 3 of 4 doctors endorse me,  
 And all of my ladies are spayed.

Sing, *Tenderloin, tenderloin*

And all are guaranteed shockproof,  
 And all have been wormed and sprayed;  
 Their tears won't run when you kiss them,

And cherry red won't fade.

Sing, *Tenderloin, tenderloin*

Dian's in her crib with her teddy,  
She is really no longer afraid;  
Jill lies down with the Ripper,  
One on each side of his blade.

Sing, *Tenderloin, tenderloin*

My cuisine is simply exquisite,  
I serve green lemonade,  
Crumpets at four in the morning  
With potassium marmalade.

Sing, *Tenderloin, tenderloin*

I exercise business acumen  
To get my expenses defrayed;  
I pacify bulls with \$3 bills  
And stash them upstairs when they're paid.

Sing, *Tenderloin, tenderloin*

**Here resort Abell to a taverner, seyynge hys tale  
of Eden**

The neon sign  
Said ENTER so  
I did. The guy  
Behind the bar  
Was a good joe

So I put my  
Foot on the rail,  
Bent my elbow,  
And started to spill  
My maudlin tale.

*Every morning at four  
I'd knock three times  
on my girl's barn door,*

*and we'd play seven card stud,  
up and down the river,  
spit in the ocean,  
and low hole card wild  
in her hayloft.  
My best friends  
dropped up too.  
The coati-mundi ,  
who dealt left handed,  
was apt to bet  
all his stars on aces-up.  
The roc, who talked  
and talked and talked  
about running for alderman,  
played conservatively  
and only backed a sure thing.  
I always dropped out  
when he bet more than three moons.  
The echidna munched cough drops  
and bluffed a lot.  
I was lucky as hell,  
liked inside straights  
and would even draw two to a flush.  
My girl sat in the hay and smiled.  
At exactly 6:45,  
I folded up the sky  
And put all the stars and moons  
Back in the box.  
Then the coati-mundi,  
The roc, and the echidna  
Would all head for their stalls,  
And I would pull down the clouds  
And take my girl to bed.*

At story's end,  
Joe, the nice guy  
Behind the bar,  
Poured down a neat

Shot of cheap rye,  
Said, Bud, that's a  
Pretty filthy  
Story and threw  
Me in the street  
On hands and knees.

### **The song of Cayn**

Let the son of a bitch find his own goddamn  
undertaker.  
Am I my brother's keeper?

### **Here com Abell with all the pepull**

I ferry down the concrete river  
On the backs of grinning centaurs.  
Alderman Roc leads the parade.  
Marie floats by, belching smoke.  
Ghosts stand in the gutter  
Reading their obituaries  
Flashed in neon from the ferris wheel.  
And then I see him sitting on the curb.  
I pray you, Brother, let me die.  
He winks.

And goes on gnawing at the jawbone of his  
ass.

### **Last a songe of Abell**

I only came up from the country  
To spend a couple of nights;  
Now I'll be here for hundreds of years,  
Waiting my last rites.

**James C. Waugh**