

# THE BELOIT POETRY JOURNAL

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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 didascalie:  
 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.

