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# Charles Drummond and Carlos Baudelaire: an encounter over urban botany

**Gustavo Chataignier Gadelha**

**Abstract**

This text aims to entertain a dialogue with the modern *pathos* as evidenced by two poets, separated by eras but nevertheless close in their effort to understand the new experiences offered by life in big modern cities: Charles Baudelaire, in France, and Carlos Drummond de Andrade, in Brazil. Bearing in mind especially the writings of Walter Benjamin, for whom the transitory character of the present in vivid experience could liquefy individual expectations and models of uniqueness, we put forth the thesis that the verses of these poets are able to offer a privileged literary image - for both their newness and their beauty. Ultimately, Nietzsche's concept of eternal recurrence is called upon, as the reiteration of commodification and the *modus vivendi bourgeois* can lead to the emergence of a critical subjectivity which is therefore immanent as a possibility.

*Translated from French by Roberto Mendonça Muggiati*

## Introduction

My aim is to suggest a possible dialogue between two poets, counting on the help of a philosopher. One of them is really well-known, being the very spirit of the streets of Paris: Charles Baudelaire. The other one doesn't figure among famous authors—despite recent translations of his body of work<sup>1</sup>—at least in France. We are talking about the Brazilian poet, Carlos Drummond de Andrade, his so-called 'homonym.' It's interesting to remark that the literary critic Alceu Amoroso Lima, under the pseudonym of Tristão Athayde, asserted that "Drummond is our Baudelaire" – that is, a "Brazilian one," whose work dates from 1930's to 1980's. They certainly are close, especially when one considers them as a kind of recurrence or else as a vanishing image that connects different ages. Besides that, as mentioned before, I shall use as a working tool the concepts of Walter Benjamin, who dedicated a series of articles to Baudelaire's *œuvre*. Foremost, I shall tackle the subjects of *flânerie* and *spleen* or melancholy; afterwards, I shall establish a comparison between poems of both authors. To tell the truth, this work was born not because of an abstract connection between its themes, but because of the closeness of titles used by the two writers: *The flowers of evil* and *The flower and the nausea*. However, from a strictly theoretical point of view, it is not inaccurate to say that, each in their own way—and, for Baudelaire, from the outset—was inclined to use the rhythms of modernity. If the poet dreads the anonymous masses, he still will find a refuge or catch a glimpse of a passing glance, and that not without a certain amount of spleen.

## Baudelaire : Fencing in the Street

Baudelaire wanted to make himself understood and that is why he addressed his 'likenesses.' Because of his feeble willpower and concentration, he felt uncomfortable and even hindered to read lyric poems: "These readers prefer the pleasure of the senses and are accustomed to spleen, which nullifies all

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<sup>1</sup> Carlos Drummond de Andrade has published more than twenty poetry books and his body of work also includes chronicles, short stories and translations of Proust and Balzac, among others. Some of his books have been translated into English, including: *Souvenir of the Ancient World*, translated by Mark Strand (Antaeus Editions, 1976); *Looking for Poetry: Poems by Carlos Drummond de Andrade and Rafael Alberti, with Songs from the Quechua*, translated by Mark Strand (Knopf, 2002); *Travelling in the family : selected poems of Carlos Drummond de Andrade*, translated by Thomas Colchie (Random House, 1986); *The minus sign: selected poems*, translated by Virginia de Araújo (Black Swan, 1980); *In the middle of the road; selected poems*, translated by John A. Nist (University of Arizona, 1965).

interest and receptivity.”<sup>2</sup> The peers referred by the poet are the men in the street, whom he meets and salutes with the renowned verse: “Hypocrite reader, my likeness, my brother!”<sup>3</sup> The second half of the nineteenth century saw the depreciation of lyric poetry, made evident by the following facts: the lyricist is not a poet anymore and, after Baudelaire, there will be no great accomplishment in this field; the readership avoids all kind of lyric poetry. Once the conditions of receptivity become less favourable, these poems have little to say about the reader’s experience.

Baudelaire is the author of a poetry based upon the impact of modern urban life. That, according to Walter Benjamin, means his poetry possess a dimension of conscience and History: from the moment he creates a new expression that lives up to its present, he exceeds the old and gives himself a historical comprehension. The greater the achievement of consciousness, the more these expressions will be experienced and easily forgotten, not being incorporated into the unconscious. However, tragedy consists of ruminating upon whatever overtakes us, exactly for being so strong. Following Benjamin’s pattern, of Freudian inspiration, experience establishes an exact chronological position within conscience, working as a reappropriation of the event. Given the event, the failure of this reflective process produces the ‘leap’, i.e., the astonishment.

Baudelaire incorporates impact to his experience: he takes it to its final consequences, up till the roar of the artist before the creation of his idiosyncrasies.<sup>4</sup> The image of ‘self-fencing,’ Constantin Guys’ metaphor on the poem *The Sun*,<sup>5</sup> is the one that best defines the poet’s means of avoiding environmental impact, of resisting while he creates. Contact with the masses shocks him. It is important to notice the masses are not a structured group, but rather “(...) an anamorphic multitude of passers-by, simple people walking down the street.”<sup>6</sup> The *flâneur* desires to give a face to this multitude; being amongst them is the experience he won’t stop telling about. According to Benjamin, this multitude does not appear in Baudelaire following a model; his ‘model’ was nothing other than the present experience. Over all, it concerns a “hidden

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<sup>2</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Sobre Alguns Temas em Baudelaire*. In: *Charles Baudelaire: Um Lírico no Auge do Capitalismo - Obras Escolhidas III*. Translation by Alves Baptista, H. São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1994 A, p. 103.

<sup>3</sup> Charles Baudelaire, *As flores do mal*, Tr. Haddad, J. São Paulo: Difusão Européia do Livro, 1964, p.81. We would like to inform the reader that, despite the reference to the Brazilian edition, the quotations are those of Baudelaire in *The flowers of evil* and can be found, in French (as “*Les fleurs du mal*”), at the following website:

<http://baudelaire.litteratura.com/?rub=oeuvre&srub=pov&id=5&s=1> ; furthermore, all English translation, excepted when indicated, are by Roberto Mendonça Muggiati (included Drummond’s verses).

<sup>4</sup> Benjamin, *Sobre Alguns Temas em Baudelaire*, 1994 A, p.109-11.

<sup>5</sup> Benjamin, *Paris do Segundo Império*. In: *Charles Baudelaire: Um Lírico no Auge do Capitalismo - Obras Escolhidas III*. Tr. Alves Baptista, H. São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1994 B, p.68. For Baudelaire’s poem: *Les fleurs du mal*, 1964, p.224; English translation by William Aggeler, *The Flowers of Evil* (Fresno, CA: Academy Library Guild, 1954).

<sup>6</sup> Benjamin, *Sobre Alguns Temas em Baudelaire*, 1994 A, p.113.

image,” the nearness to a possible reader, as hypocrite, as himself.<sup>7</sup> The man with the powerless sword unleashes blows in order to find a way amidst the multitude, since he is and is not with it. Going back to the poem *The Sun* we’ll find the poet’s image in the empty suburbs, where he sets himself on a battle against “the ghost multitude of words.”<sup>8</sup> But which multitude is this? Is it the urban conglomerate alien to its cultural output? Or is it the poet, who, surrounded and isolated, finds himself unable to tell what he is about to experience. Perhaps we should bring in Gide’s thoughts on Baudelaire, when he asserted that the latter’s body of work carried an intermittence between image and idea, word and object<sup>9</sup>. Benjamin sums it up by saying that this fencing match, which unleashes many random shots, heroically transforms necessity into virtue.<sup>10</sup>

### Dazed and Confused: a Modern Renewal of Beauty

According to Benjamin’s vision, multitude has a “cunning of nature.” What happens in the streets and within the urban space brings people together, regardless of their social class (in traffic and on sidewalks, for example). These are concrete agglomerations, but nevertheless socially abstract, since these individuals find themselves isolated from their interests—like customers gathered around the ‘common purpose,’ of goods. This reunion represents chance in market economy. Totalitarianism does nothing else other than massify it even more, automating behaviours: referring to Nazism, Benjamin underlines the “ideology of a race reconciled” with its destiny.<sup>11</sup> One of favourite themes of nineteenth century’s writers, (the name of Victor Hugo comes to mind) multitudes behave as the public of a poem that is viewed at a glance. In this sense, it is not inaccurate to say that Baudelaire *is* the mass that he himself does not describe: The mass “is the flag aflutter from where Baudelaire sees Paris.”<sup>12</sup> The modern dazzlement experienced by some of human life’s most diverse forms was also called “the phantasmagoria, where those who wait spend their time”, contradictory and utterly alone<sup>13</sup>.

In the series of Baudelaire’s poems suggestively entitled *Parisian Scenes*, the poem *The Little Old Women* excels “(...) the step that cannot keep its pace,” with

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<sup>7</sup> The recluse poet from Itabira places his desire for the future in the present, as we can read in the poem *Hand in hand*, after going through a series of disillusion: “Time is my matter, present times, / present men, present life” (Carlos Drummond de Andrade, *Obras Completas*, Rio de Janeiro, Nova Aguilar, 1988, p.68).

<sup>8</sup> Benjamin, *Sobre Alguns Temas em Baudelaire*, 1994 A, p.111-3.

<sup>9</sup> Quoted by Walter Benjamin, *Sobre Alguns Temas em Baudelaire*, 1994 A, p.112. Cf. “Baudelaire et Monsieur Faguet”. In: *Morceaux choisis*, Paris, 1921, p.128.

<sup>10</sup> Benjamin, *Paris do Segundo Império*, 1994 B, p.70.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* p.58.

<sup>12</sup> Benjamin, *Sobre Alguns Temas em Baudelaire*, 1994 A, p.114-7.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

a “heroic”<sup>14</sup> gesture that preserves the wish to change the world. Here is an excerpt, also dedicated to Hugo:

Deep in the tortuous folds of ancient towns, / Where all, even horror,  
to enchantment turns, / I watch, obedient to my fatal mood, / For the  
decrepit, strange and charming beings<sup>15</sup>

The genre called ‘panoramic literature’ takes its initial steps with descriptions of the French capital. First printed as *feuilletons*, “the gala dress of this kind of writing, destined by nature to sell itself in the streets,” these works gathered anecdotes with information and visual details. It detached itself from ‘physiology’ of fascicules, which talked about visits to the opera or about bakers. Any kind of human portrait could be done, as long as it was inoffensive and peaceful, according to the way the *flâneur* “gardens in the streets.”<sup>16</sup> The *flâneur* is not necessarily a ‘writer’ nor a ‘literate.’ At most, he is an acrobat of fine writing, a lover of fights that unify and separate neighbours, merchants and their customers. This *flâneur* is sometimes the minstrel of urban chaos and sometimes a practical figure who is the subject of his narrative. Nowadays, if we ever use this term, it’s hardly to describe a literary movement—except that of Baudelaire. *Flânerie*, therefore, is what physiologist literature describes, i.e., the action of walking turtles by cafés—beating Taylor;<sup>17</sup> this sphere being thoroughly indifferent to the frenetic rhythm that dictates the reproduction of capital. Confined in an obsessive manner within this market space and yet a guarantor of secret stories, it is there, however, that the *flâneur* realizes time exists.<sup>18</sup> He recalls, in search of lost experience.

Furthermore, the image of a labyrinthic life takes place in the city and, “unbeknownst to him, the *flâneur* pursuists this reality.”<sup>19</sup> His phantasmagoria (in the sense of a monomania) is to lust, through physiognomy, for the ‘being’ of his silent interlocutors, giving them a story, describing their professions and habits. According to Benjamin, the *flâneur* discovers the unheard corners of back streets and boulevards, which corresponds to the “trivialization of space” phenomena.<sup>20</sup> Sometimes we hold our minds open toward the new and sometimes it is entangled with the fetishism of what’s indoors. Surrounded by mystery, the *flâneur* is always underneath the primacy of equivocation; he creates images of what is, what is not and what it can be, “(...) according to the state of mind of the observer. Everything seems more than suggestive to him once they appear.”<sup>21</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Sobre Alguns Temas em Baudelaire*, 1994 A, p.114-7.

<sup>15</sup> Baudelaire, *Les fleurs du mal*, 1964, p.232.

<sup>16</sup> Benjamin, *Paris do Segundo Império*, 1994 B, p.33-4.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* p.51.

<sup>18</sup> Sérgio Paulo Rouanet, *As Razões do Iluminismo*. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1987, p.76.

<sup>19</sup> Benjamin, *O Flâneur*. In: *Charles Baudelaire: Um Lírico no Auge do Capitalismo - Obras Escolhidas III*. Tr. Alves Baptista, H. São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1994C, p.202-3.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> Odilon Redon, quoted by Benjamin. In: *O Flâneur*, 1994 C, p.202 (“Arts et métiers graphiques”, Paris, 7/1<sup>st</sup>/1935, n° 47, p.7).

Moreover, the *flâneur* distinguishes himself from the pedestrian since, paradoxically, he is concerned to preserve his private life when in a vast space: “He strolls idly like a personality, thus protesting against the division of work that turns people into specialists.”<sup>22</sup> The “place comes to life” with his proximity; he does not hesitate to give up his erudition for the ability to “sniff” dog-like, the addresses of anonymous people.<sup>23</sup> This is the reason why the poet’s ‘New’ is the ‘Same’ transformed into poetry. Nevertheless, since the *flâneur* doesn’t know where his wanderings will take him, we are led to wonder if poet and poetry have been beaten. The *spleen-poem* called *The taste of nothingness* evokes the bittersweetness of dismantling an experience that is lost:<sup>24</sup>

Dejected soul, once anxious for the strife, / Hope, whose spur fanned  
your ardor into flame, / No longer wishes to mount you! Lie down  
shamelessly, / Old horse who stumbles over every rut. / Resign  
yourself, my heart; sleep your brutish sleep. / Conquered, foundered  
spirit! For you, old jade, / Love has no more relish, no more than war;  
/ Farewell then, songs of the brass and sighs of the flute! / Pleasure,  
tempt no more a dark, sullen heart! / Adorable spring has lost its  
fragrance! / And Time engulfs me minute by minute, / As the immense  
snow a stiffening corpse; / I survey from above the roundness of the  
globe / And I no longer seek there the shelter of a hut. / Avalanche,  
will you sweep me along in your fall?<sup>25</sup>

Despite this series of mishaps, salvation is possible and the flower of evil that grows from the addled tarmac carries a delicate fragrance: “this scent is the inaccessible refuge of the involuntary memory,”<sup>26</sup> and here Benjamin doesn’t hesitate to rely on Proust. The perfume associated with the “phlegmatic consciousness”<sup>27</sup> can once more support the unbearable and relentless flow of time because “a scent undoes whole years within the scent of what is remembered”<sup>28</sup>; we shall walk among ruins, paying attention to the flowers. Apart from the solitary *proustian* option for art, Benjamin is of the opinion that the energy wrapped inside shock, as explained in his writings on surrealism, is the lifeblood of a practical commitment whose aim is Revolution. Certainly, time, as perceived by the involuntary memory, is not exactly ‘historical,’ and yet it comes to light in History, jumping like a tiger, acting on reification and, according to a benjaminian language, points to a prehistory. However, spleen exposes what has been lived to an unveiling—in what concerns the effects held by the shape of the subject and the formative mediations of that which is effective, to reference Hegel. This is the reason why a melancholic person finds

<sup>22</sup> Benjamin, *O Flâneur*, 1994 C, p.47-50.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* p.185.

<sup>24</sup> Benjamin, *Sobre Alguns Temas em Baudelaire*, 1994 A, p.127-33.

<sup>25</sup> Baudelaire, *Les fleurs du mal*, 1964, p.215.

<sup>26</sup> Benjamin, *Sobre Alguns Temas em Baudelaire*, 1994 A, p.133-7.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

himself on a natural planet, with no History, and, because of that, deprived of aura or commitment.<sup>29</sup>

According to Charles Baudelaire, “the pleasure of finding yourself among a multitude is the mysterious expression of joy by means of the multiplication of numbers.”<sup>30</sup> If one is to believe Benjamin, this is the point of view of goods: in other words, the little bourgeois poet’s sensitivity nourishes itself with the necessity of consumption. The bigger the pleasure, the more intense is the entanglement in the heart of the flawed society where merchandise sparkles. The “virtuosity” within this pleasure must, therefore, take into consideration the identification with the merchandise. Can such a meeting actually know it and save it or does it make all criticism derail through its reckless adherence? The answer is wide open: “(...) it was necessary for this identification to be filled by a sensibility that hadn’t still realized the enchantments present in damaged and corrupted things.”<sup>31</sup> The allegorist gaze of the *flâneur* produces dialectic images and establishes a constellation between present and times gone by: the instant photograph reveals the contingent gathering of those whose identity is nothing more than dispersal. Its action is always hesitant between old and new, fetishism and difference, contained in the image that could not be moral and is nothing when taken by itself, but is rather an outcome of a primordial perception. As put by Benjamin, “the description of confusion is not the same as a confused description”:<sup>32</sup> “We try to carry through the city’s new experiences within the frame of the old ones, transmitted by nature.”<sup>33</sup> The city discovered by the *flâneur* is the background for new experiences raised by tradition. What unites them is the naturality of the action provided by a plastic nature, i.e., one that is not entirely determined, or predictable.

Therefore, the beauty of Baudelaire’s verses is somehow originated by the emergence of an abyss so that modernity, adds Benjamin, is the background for these images.<sup>34</sup> Dialectically, continues the German philosopher, Baudelaire’s poetry draws back the new from what is always old and the old from what is always new.<sup>35</sup> Baudelaire’s spleen, his melancholy, stands as a “bulwark against pessimism.” Nevertheless, his heroism does not propose any kind of reflection on the future of bourgeois society; by means of a monadological structure, his work relates to other cultural manifestations thanks to the universal spleen of what is made present, thenceforth marked by modernity.<sup>36</sup> François Porché,

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Baudelaire, quoted by Benjamin. In: *Paris do Segundo Império*, 1994 B, p.54 (Œuvres, 2 volumes, Paris, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1931/1932, II, p.626)

<sup>31</sup> Benjamin, *Paris do Segundo Império*, 1994 B, p.55.

<sup>32</sup> Benjamin, *Parque Central*. In: *Charles Baudelaire: Um Lírico no Auge do Capitalismo - Obras Escolhidas III*. Tr. Alves Baptista, H. São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1994D, p.159.

<sup>33</sup> Benjamin, *O Flâneur*, 1994 C, p.226.

<sup>34</sup> Benjamin, *Parque Central*, 1994D, p.151.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. p.165.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. p.152.



Baudelaire's biographer, defined the poet's work as boredom experienced amidst fog, beside the noises of the city that provoke spleen.<sup>37</sup>

Even after witnessing the alienation that is always present, Marx bet on the possibility of a change in social relationships by means of the fraternity among men. The association of the working class creates new social bonds. The type of society described in the Parisian Manuscripts is roughly a contemporary of Baudelaire (let's not forget that *The flowers of evil* were first published in 1857). Thus, Marx's quote is also valid for the poet. He sustains that the worker is not entirely alienated by abstract work:

Smoking, eating and drinking are no longer simply means that bring people together. Society, association, conversation, which again has society as its end, are enough for them; the brotherhood of men is not an empty phrase, but a fact of life, and the nobility of man shines upon us from their work-hardened bodies.<sup>38</sup>

In the "D" section of his book on Paris, Benjamin presents a testimonial from Paul Lafargue by which in 1848 Marx would have revealed for the first time to Engels the foundations of historical materialism at a Parisian coffee shop, the Café de la Régence.<sup>39</sup> Was Benjamin also trying to hint that Marx and Engels were about to stroll?

### Carlos Drummond de Andrade: Life and Work

Before commencing with an outline of Carlos Drummond de Andrade's explicit mentions of his fellow poet, Baudelaire, I will first present some biographical and literary notes which may help those unfamiliar with the Brazilian writer situate his work.

Carlos Drummond de Andrade (1902-1987) is considered Brazil's supreme poet, only rivaled by the Portuguese Fernando Pessoa (1888-1935) when it comes to the lusophone world. To many people, he was even greater. Brazilian intellectuals believe the limited international reach of his native language might be the reason why he was never awarded a Nobel Prize in Literature (and the same goes nowadays regarding Ferreira Gullar). Born in a family of traditional landowners in Minas Gerais' countryside, the poet-to-be was raised in the small steel town of Itabira. Memories of the excavations and its hardness would later reappear as metaphors. As a restless youth, he left towards Nova Friburgo, in the State of Rio de Janeiro, where he would become a seminarian. Records

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<sup>37</sup> Quoted by Benjamin. *La Vie douloureuse de Charles Baudelaire*, Paris, 1926, p.184. In: *Paris, Capitale du XIX<sup>e</sup> Siècle*. Trad. Lacoste, J. Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1993, p.127.

<sup>38</sup> Karl Marx, *Manuscritos Económico-Filosóficos*. Tr. Campos, J. Cidade do México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1962, p.158.

<sup>39</sup> Quoted by Benjamin. "Persönliche Erinnerungen an Friedrich Engels", *Die Neue Zeit*, Stuttgart, 1905, XXIII, 2, p.558. In: *Paris, Capitale du XIX<sup>e</sup> Siècle*, 1993, p.133.

show us that he was then expelled for “mental insubordination.” After going to Belo Horizonte, capital of Minas Gerais, he graduated in Pharmacy and started producing the first literary magazines with help from some friends.

His first book, *Alguma poesia* (or *Some poetry*—not “all of it,” criticizing the idealistic Parnassian’s poetry totality), was published with his own funds in 1930. It follows the modernist lineage of free verses and quotidian contents (with no “aura,” as a Walter Benjamin admirer could argue). Therein lied the poem “*No meio do caminho*”<sup>40</sup> (*In the middle of the road*), which caused a fuss among literate readers. How dared a poem, which subject was nothing but a stone, arise itself as a poetic form? Furthermore, the repetition of words showed more of a poetic inability on constructing verses than a real idea. However, those hastened readings failed to spot the “hardness” feature of the persisting stone and were unable to recognize the metaphor—made much more difficult because of its object. A skylad poem, with no repetitions, would show no other than a mere account of the facts. According to José Miguel Wisnik, the reader becomes the witness of a shock between person and thing, in front of a literary “event,”<sup>41</sup> when novelty appears. Had Drummond only written those verses, his place in literature would still be assured. Nevertheless, that was but his first book and, fortunately, many more would follow. In Brazil, “a stone in one’s way” is a trite phrase, which, still according to Wisnik, makes Drummond a true “hit maker.” And let’s not forget the statue of the poet, sitting on a bench in Copacabana Beach, where many a tourist and curious person go to take pictures – and relieve him of his glasses.

“*No meio do caminho*” was translated as “*In the middle of the road*” by Elizabeth Bishop:

In the middle of the road there was a stone/ there was a stone in /  
the middle of the road / there was a stone / in the middle of the road  
there was a stone. / Never should I forget this event / in the life of my  
fatigued retinas. / Never should I forget that / in the middle of the  
road / there was a stone / there was a stone in the middle of the road  
/ in the middle of the road there was a stone.<sup>42</sup>

In 1945, Drummond started working for the Federal Government as the chief of staff to the Minister of Education and Health, Gustavo Capanema, an old friend from Belo Horizonte. Many artist and intellectuals were taken under the

<sup>40</sup> We will soon have it’s translation in a few lines.

<sup>41</sup> In: “*Categorias mentais*”, *Jornal O Globo*, Segundo Caderno, Rio de Janeiro, December 2nd, 2011.

<sup>42</sup> Elizabeth Bishop, who lived in Brazil, has also translated the “*Seven-sided poem*”, from his début book, *Some poetry*, 1930: “Universe, vast universe,/ if I had been named Eugene/ that would not be what I mean/ but it would go into verse faster./ Universe, vast universe,/ my heart is vaster” (*An Anthology of Twentieth Century Brazilian Poetry*, org. by Elizabeth Bishop and Emanuel Brasil, Wesleyan University Press 1972). Here there is the original version: “Mundo mundo vasto mundo,/ se eu me chamasse Raimundo,/ seria uma rima, não seria uma solução./ Mundo mundo vasto mundo,/ Mais vasto é meu coração”.

auspices of Capanema, including Mário de Andrade, Cândido Portinari, Manuel Bandeira, Heitor Vila-Lobos, Cecília Meireles, Lúcio Costa, Vinícius de Moraes, Afonso Arinos de Melo Franco and Rodrigo Melo Franco de Andrade.

Even if the job's remuneration and its laid back nature gave Drummond time and tranquillity to go on with his literary life, the boredom of that day-to-day activity was not indifferent to his creative genius, as shown in the posthumous poem entitled "*Paperland Slave*": "Oh you bureaucrats / how I hate you / and if it was only hate / it is still the sentiment of life / that I lost being one of you."<sup>43</sup>

### From the Reading Poet to the Breaking Stones Verses

The verses of *Get drunk*, from Baudelaire's *Little poems in prose* (1862), are revisited by Drummond in his *Poema da necessidade* ("Poem of the necessity"): "It's necessary to study Volapük / It's necessary to always get drunk / It's necessary to pick the flowers / which ancient authors speak about."<sup>44</sup> Very quickly we unveil the ambiguity of said flowers, sometimes shown as the repository of the Dionysian creation drunkenness as well as the sign of a non-belonging to the world in face of which no Esperanto or Volapük can help: at the end of the poem, he exalts "the end of the world." In other words, the question is to know how beauty can last or even emerge, amidst indifference. In any case, ordinary prose no longer speaks, hence the need for poetry.

The chronicler side of Drummond also points towards the genius of Baudelaire. On a letter addressed to a young poet, Drummond gives him some pieces of advice, including this one: "Allow yourself to be photographed at will, but do not call the photographers; do not refuse them, but don't be mortified either if their request never comes. Homer has left neither letters nor portraits, while Baudelaire has left both. It's what happens on other papers that is essential."<sup>45</sup> In Drummond, the poem's quest is a search of lost time – incidentally, the poet contributed a Portuguese translation of *The fugitive*, by Marcel Proust. At the expense of 'family skeletons' and external invocations to a living connection with this strange kingdom of words, the poem becomes the mean by which things carry a 'being,' as this extract from *Searching for poetry* shows:

Enter the kingdom of words as if you were deaf. / There you'll find  
poems that hope to be written. / They are paralyzed, but there is no

<sup>43</sup> *Farewell*, Rio de Janeiro, Record, 1996.

<sup>44</sup> "É preciso estudar volapuque/ é preciso estar sempre bêbedo,/ é preciso ler Baudelaire/ é preciso colher as flores/ de que falam velhos autores." (*Sentimento do Mundo* in *Obras Completas*, 1988, p.63). All of Drummond's translations were made by Roberto Mendonça Muggiati.

<sup>45</sup> "Deixe-se fotografar à vontade, sem chamar os fotógrafos; não recuse autógrafos, mas não se mortifique se não os pedirem. Homero não deixou cartas nem retratos, mas Baudelaire deixou uns e outros. O essencial se passa com outros papéis" (Carlos Drummond de Andrade, *A um jovem*. In: *A bolsa & a vida. Crônicas*. Rio de Janeiro: Editora do Autor, 1962, p. 115-118).

despair. / There is calmness and freshness upon their intact surface /  
Here they are, alone and quiet, in dictionary condition.<sup>46</sup>

It is hard to measure how much Charles Baudelaire's body of work could have influenced that of Carlos Drummond de Andrade. Anyhow, it seems evident that, apart from the almost mandatory reference and connection to one of Modernism's pioneers, there are still thematic bonds to be explored. Hugo Friedrich suggests an interpretative spin on Baudelaire when the poet talks about "obsession" on a namesake poem in *The flowers of evil*. According to the researcher, we are given the possibility of entering the poetic discourse through the construction of a network where the obsessed words assemble (and perhaps resemble): "The word denounces its obsession," in this case, the poet's.<sup>47</sup> In the Baudelarian verses which we have just referred to, wood metamorphoses itself into frightening cathedrals, the ocean is the "tumult" where immerses the "vanquished man". Nonetheless, nature is not immune to chaos: underneath the starlight, seeking emptiness is an impossible task and darkness itself becomes a "canvas". The picture will be "familiar", judges the poet. However, it is nothing but the transposition, or even confusion, between nature and culture, due to the frantic pace of life in big cities.

That said, Drummond can now enter the scene, since, at least at the outset of his artistic production, he too will explore poetic routes of similar pathos. The rue du Regard, *Gaze Street*, at Paris sixth *arrondissement*, where once baptisms took place,<sup>48</sup> caught the Brazilian poet's attention—and that without him ever going there (apart from Brazil, he has only been to Argentina). His imaginary journey to old Europe takes him to a place where gazes meet with no sign of haste; and that in spite of men and perhaps thanks to the street itself and its vision: it is the street that "founds hope / perforates disgust / opens a long tunnel / and smiles at the hands / at the chin, at the rose / at the smallest things / of you, my brother!"<sup>49</sup> He continues: "among many streets, / around the world, / the *rue du Regard*, / in Paris, touches me."<sup>50</sup> Paris and Rio have a dialogue.

The meeting gazes will always be sought after. Drummond's obsession is found in the clashes experienced through multitude and solitude—an emptiness that will be populated by poetry, a *Lacking that Loves*, title of one of his books. In *The Witch*, the lyrical I is frustrated either when thrown among the crowd or at his apartment. In the end, the magical and hallucinatory proliferation of people in Rio bears no comparison to that of Minas Gerais. At the time, there were two million people living in Rio. The poet had no friend and no woman would give in

<sup>46</sup> "Penetra surdamente no reino das palavras./ Lá estão os poemas que esperam ser escritos./  
Estão paralisados, mas não há desespero,/ há calma e frescura na superfície intata./ Ei-los sós e  
mudos, em estado de dicionário."

<sup>47</sup> Hugo Friedrich, *A Estrutura da Lírica Moderna*, São Paulo, Livraria Duas Cidades, 1978, p.45.

<sup>48</sup> <http://www.paris-pittoresque.com/rues/205.htm> .

<sup>49</sup> "Que funda esperança/ perfura o desgosto,/ abre um longo túnel/ e sorri na boca!/ E sorri nas  
mãos,/ no queixo, na rosa,/ no menor dos bens/ de ti, meu irmão!"

<sup>50</sup> "Entre tantas ruas/ que passam no mundo,/ a rue du Regard,/ em Paris, me toca".

to his “mad caresses”; there was nobody to listen to his “tender words.” Here are some of the ordeals that a foreigner in a similar situation could face in his *carioca* journey.<sup>51</sup> The intensity of his distress only increases: alone in Rio, alone in Brazil, alone in America, alone in the world! The poem ends with an ascertainment of lucidity, the kind that can only be found in the soil: “Comrades, listen to me! / This agitated presence / Wishing to break the night away / is not simply the witch / But rather the confidence / exhaling itself from man.”<sup>52</sup> If the centre of the subject seems to have been reacquired after such a catharsis, it is not certain that public roads are devoid of stones. The question keeps coming up: “And now, José?”<sup>53</sup> What to celebrate?

### World Influence

The poet, hard as the steel from his hometown, will not bend in the face of beauty. Inside Drummond’s microcosms, our cartography takes us to *The flower and the nausea*, first published in 1945’s *People’s rose*. This poem, in our interpretation, has the ‘advantage,’ as to say, of gathering some of the principal drummondian characteristics as observed during his life: irony, nihilism, social themes, prosaic images and the reflexion problem of the existential question about “being in the word.”

Literary critic Affonso Romano de Sant’Anna<sup>54</sup> sustains that the poet’s body of work could—and should—be divided in three great periods, according to his relationship to the ‘world,’ one of his recurring themes. First, there is the ironic, modernist and a ‘bigger-than-the-world’ Drummond, which Auerbach would see as a ‘mixed style’ (where day-to-day themes converge with classic forms), lasting until 1940. Then there is the Drummond concerned about social themes, where the world was bigger than the lyrical I, which lasted until 1950. And finally there is the last of these periods, the so-called ‘metaphysic phase,’ where both world and the lyrical I are equivalent (erotic verses would find place in the poet’s 1980s’ output and in his posthumous releases). These divisions are not carved in stone and should be merely seen as a guideline: there is no purity or, to quote one of the poet’s books, none of “the impurities of white” (1973) can be found.

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<sup>51</sup> Carioca refers to the city of Rio de Janeiro.

<sup>52</sup> “Companheiros, escutai-me! / Essa presença agitada / querendo romper a noite / não é simplesmente a bruxa. / É antes a confiança / exalando-se de um homem.”

<sup>53</sup> A reference to one of Drummond’s most famous poem, *José*, the *ritornello* of which has become a popular saying in Brazil: in face of a problem, it is not strange to hear or say “what now, José?” as a final attempt of consolation (ironically, of course). Its verses show quite a repertoire of frustrations: “What now, José? / The party is over, / the lights are out / the crowd is gone, / the night has turned cold / What now, José? / What now, you? / You with no name, / who mock other people, / you who write verses, / who love and protest? / What now, José?”. Here is the original extract in Portuguese: “E agora, José? / A festa acabou, / a luz apagou, / o povo sumiu, / a noite esfriou, / e agora, José? / e agora, você? / você que é sem nome, / que zomba dos outros, / você que faz versos, / que ama, protesta? / e agora, José?”.

<sup>54</sup> cf. Drummond - *o Gauche no Tempo*, Rio de Janeiro, Record, 1990.

The following extract can be found in the first stanza of *The flower and the nausea*:

Stuck to my class and some clothes, / I dress white walking down the  
grey street, / Melancholy, merchandise peek at me, / Should I go till  
nausea sets in? Can I, with no weapons, revolt?<sup>55</sup>

His wish is not to give a soul to the things that, under the shape of commodities, watch him. There is nothing he can do, “the dead capture the living.” The time never came. Time for what? We do not know the clocks are dirty; certainly, it is not the time for justice, he tells us. Faeces and bad poems, hallucinations, all give rise to “poor times, the poor poet,” gathered “in the same impasse.” Mere presence, the fact that one is in this world, eludes those who seek: wherever we look at we stumble across “codes.” His forty years are not a reason to celebrate: “no problem solved, not even proposed” admits this contemporary of Alain Leroy, from Louis Malle’s *The fire within*.<sup>56</sup> Passersby read their newspapers, “less free” to the shelter offered by this derisory home. Thereby, they “spell the world, knowing they are losing it.” The sun, a cosmic force, seems to comfort them, but suddenly they don’t “feel renewed”: natural return is not difference, to put it as Löwith and Deleuze did. Hence the silent cry: “Things. How sad they are, these things, when considered with no emphasis.”

The character notices a flower; however, for the moment, he cannot remember anything else but his ‘crimes’; some of them, such as poetry, are mild. Those who remain are the “ferocious bakers of Evil,” side by side with the “ferocious milkmen of Evil.”<sup>57</sup> To put it in other words, the flower doesn’t speak (yet) through itself, its smell and petals. It’s because “hate” is the “best” the poet has to offer.

But a new twist will take place. Something has happened and the poem must follow this change. The imperative now is to stop trams, buses, all traffic; only silence, halt all business: a flower is born: “Its colour cannot be perceived. / Its petals won’t open. / Its name cannot be found on books. / It is hideous. But it’s really a flower.” Guided by the thing, the poet feels at ease to sit on the floor during the rush hour in the former capital of Brazil; he is hesitant, and yet feels

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<sup>55</sup> To make things clear for English-speaking readers, we would like to remark that the aforementioned “*classe*” regards the social class and not the one in school. Resuming our interpretation, blowing up Manhattan Island is not a task for one man alone, armed only with his “elegies”, as it shows up in *Elegy 1938* (Drummond, *Obras completas*, 1988, p.73). Here is the extract in Portuguese from *A flor e a náusea* (*The flower and the nausea*) that we have just mentioned: “Preso à minha classe e a algumas roupas,/ vou de branco pela rua cinzenta./ Melancolias, mercadorias espreitam-me./ Devo seguir até o enjôo?/ Posso, sem armas, revoltar-me?”.

<sup>56</sup> The Brazilian translation of this title has achieved great success and is quite poetic, even if it provides a radical change of proposition: *Thirty years-old this evening*.

<sup>57</sup> In the position of “The Great Other”, would it be legitimate to think that Baudelaire has been denied?

the need to touch this obscure being, which he does. The contact with such a “timid life form” brings nature back to the city and vice-versa. One senses it is about to rain, for the clouds are getting heavier; even chickens show their fear and quiver. The contemplation ends with the following verses: “It is hideous. But it’s a flower. And it has broken through cement, boredom, disgust and hate.”

## Conclusion

Subjectivity doesn’t lie above reality as an essence: constituted by *chocs*, one is invited—furthermore, obliged—to evaluate the phenomenon of life. This does not mean that all individuals magically became erudites nor establish a critical distance with their living. It is about a possibility, a new starting point explained by the experience of time’s speed and the phantasmagorias of life’s reification. We are in a crossroad: if one of its chances is the critical is the unveiling of the creating processes of this reality, another possibility is to accept the truth as given immediate unconditioned.

For the romantic philosophers, all theory contained in a work of art is the theory of shape, as investigates Benjamin. And as such should be presented. The form / shape is a “reflection” of an “objective expression” as seen in a particular work. By the way, the work stands as a “living center of reflection.” Art, therefore, is nourished and renewed, since it is, *par excellence*, the “medium of reflection.” Form recognizes that, within the myriad of what was and could be art, reflection takes place only in specific cases, which leads the analysed work to the regime of contingency: reflection by form establishes self-limit—even though critical activity glances and problematizes these boundaries. Contrary to the spirit of *Aufklärung*, the form cannot be a “rule” for beauty, which annihilates the particular works. First of all, we only see the self-limitation of reflection facing a specific piece of work; not worshiping the exposure of any content, form needs no justification. It arises, as Benjamin notes, a non-dogmatic formalism. The exercise of an immanent critique must be guided by the analysis of the work of art. In the romantic case, the purpose is not to understand art, but rather to achieve the idea of art. On the one hand, mere judgment is aborted; on the other, one reaches, thanks to criticism, the systematization and organization of the work—in order to save the phenomenon by a collective memory. Finally, there is not a single doubt that the critic does not proceed to the last degree of ‘deletion’ of the work on the idea, which would nullify his own activity.<sup>58</sup>

So, to conclude, we are able to settle that Baudelaire’s and Drummond’s poems recreate, each one in a particular modernist style, the *pathos* brought with big cities’ speed and impersonality. Both poets’ flowers are not natural, or, in other words, they are mediums of reflexion. Emerging subjects can conquer time and

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<sup>58</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Le Concept de Critique Esthétique dans le Romantisme Allemand*. Tr. Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Anne-Marie Lang. Paris: Flammarion, 2008, p.117-8 and 122-3.

make reflexions on this matter, by building *a posteriori* symbolic forms to their experience and by participating on the city's life (which poses a political issue); or can buy anything—*n'importe quoi*.

It is possible to suggest a close relationship between these two major poets; from one side, Carlos Drummond de Andrade's admiration for Charles Baudelaire; from the other side, their common thematic—and indeed stylistic—views. Brazil's tardy modernism, when compared to Europe and America, always maintain the experience of shock—to be examined by the particular guiding principle that are the poems of Drummond and Baudelaire. The image we suggested aimed to maintain the irreducible status of said artistic creations: nothing but an encounter.

On his first book, *Alguma poesia*, the *Seven-sided poem* presents henceforth the kaleidoscope of the poetic subjectivity inscribed in modern life, a real *wandering metamorphosis*, to use Raul Seixas'<sup>59</sup> words. Here, the poet's fate is assigned at birth by a "maladroit angel," an evil cherub that would later reappear in Chico Buarque's<sup>60</sup> songs, who tells him: "Go on, Carlos! Be *gauche* in life!"<sup>61</sup> using the word "*gauche*" in French. The poet brings the voices of the outcasts together, of all those who exist in spite of everything. They go to the movies to watch Chaplin, as told in *Chant to the people's man—Charlie Chaplin*: "Those who were abandoned by justice, who are simple at heart speak for me, / the outcasts, the bankrupt, the mutilated, the handicapped, the repressed, / the oppressed, the loners, the undecided, the lyrical ones, the dreamers, / the reckless ones, the bashful ones, the tender ones, the mad ones and the pathetic ones."<sup>62</sup> All that, all of Baudelaire's characters, especially the old ladies who persevere to walk despite their decrepitude, tell the "history of the vanquished," a phrase coined by Walter Benjamin to shatter the belief in a mechanical liberation that takes place in a future seen as a mere projection of the mercantile present.

<sup>59</sup> Brazilian libertarian rock singer who actually sometimes recorded English versions of his songs:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-X5LySoOjIA> ("Gitã");

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tkg7xjKfXX8> ("Morning train");

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TKWOyhray2c> ("Fool's gold");

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mA4vrSH9IJE> ("Lucille & Corrine, Corrina").

Here it is the mentioned song, "Metamorfose ambulante" (Walking metamorphosis):

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7VE6PNwmr9g>.

<sup>60</sup> One of the most famous song-writer from the Brazilian Popular Music, best known as "MPB".

Buarque allies the samba with political matters, as well as with love songs. This way he guarantees a link between high and low cultural expressions: "That will pass away"

(<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ma5ThSwFblg>); "Eye to eye"

(<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c8O-IQXhYy8>).

His reference to Drummond is clear in "*Untill the end*", where a cherub reads the future for the lyrical I, citing therefore the angel who commands the poet to be "*gauche* in life".

(<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DJYbje-UGto>).

<sup>61</sup> "Vai, Carlos! ser *gauche* na vida".

<sup>62</sup> "Falam por mim os abandonados da justiça, os simples de coração,/ os párias, os falidos, os mutilados, os deficientes, os indecisos, os líricos, os cismarentos,/ os irresponsáveis, os pueris, os cariciosos, os loucos e os patéticos".



### **About the author**

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