

CARLOS DRUMMOND DE ANDRADE –
EIGHT POEMS ON LOVE, ACTIVISM, AND DISILLUSIONMENT

Translated by
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Love knocks on the core (*Brejo das almas*, 1934)

Old silly little love song
turns the world upside down,
lifts up the skirts of the women,
removes the glasses of the men,
love, however it may be,
is love.

My love, don't you cry.
Tonight there's a movie by Charlot!

Love knocks on the door,
love knocks on the core,
I got up to open, and I got sick.
Cardiac and melancholic,

love snores in the garden,
amongst orange-trees,
amongst half green grapes,
and desires that have matured.

Amongst half green grapes,
my love, there's no need to worry:
certain acids can sweeten
the shriveled lips of the old.
And when the teeth can't bite,
and when the arms can't hold,
love tickles,
love draws a curve,
proposes a geometry.

Love is a trained animal.

Look: love has jumped the fence,
love has climbed a tree,
all in time for falling down.
There, love fell down.
From here I can see the blood
dripping from the androgynous figure.
This wound, my love,
sometimes will never heal,
sometimes will heal tomorrow.

From here I can see love
annoyed, disappointed,
but I can also see other things:

I see bodies, I see souls,
I see kisses that kiss,
I hear hands that talk,
and that travel without a map.
I see many other things
that I don't even dare to understand.

Don't kill yourself (*Brejo das almas*, 1934)

Carlos, calm down. Love
is this that you are seeing:
today you kiss, tomorrow you don't kiss,
the day after tomorrow is Sunday,
and Monday no one knows
what will be.

It is useless for you to resist,
or even kill yourself.
Don't kill yourself, oh don't kill yourself.
Save yourself completely
for the wedding that no one knows
when it will come,
if it will come.

Love, Carlos, you are telluric.
Night passed through you,
the repressions that sublimate,
there inside, ineffable sounds,
prayers,

phonographs,
saints that make the sign of the holy cross,
adds for the best soap,
and a noise that no one knows
where from, what for.

And yet you proceed
melancholic and vertical.
You are the palm tree, you are the shout
that no one heard in the theater,
and all the lights that turn off.
Love in the dark, no, in the light,
is always sad, my son Carlos,
but don't say anything to anyone.
No one knows, or will ever know.
Don't kill yourself.

A necrology for the disillusioned in love (*Brejo das almas*, 1934)

The ones who are disillusioned in love
are shooting shots on their chests.
From my bedroom I can hear the fusillade.
The loved ones titillate in pleasure.
Oh, how many stories for the newspapers.

Disillusioned but photographed,
they wrote explanatory letters,
took every measure,
to cause remorse in the loved ones.

Bang bang bang, goodbye, sick to the stomach.
I go, you stay, but we'll meet again,
either on the bright sky or muddy hell.

The doctors are performing the autopsy
of the ones who are disillusioned and killed themselves.
What large hearts they had.
Enormous organs, sentimental guts,
and a stomach full of poetry...

Now let's go to the cemetery
to carry the bodies of the disillusioned
competently put in boxes
(first and second rate passions).

The disillusioned remain deluded,
heartless, gutless, loveless.
Their only possession, their golden teeth,
are no financial bond,
and covered in dust will lose their shine
while the loved ones dance a samba
bold, violent, right on the top of their graves.

Elegy 1938 (*Brejo das almas*, 1934)

You work without any joy for a decaying world
where the forms and the actions don't encompass an example.
Laboriously you enact the universal gestures.
You feel hot and cold, lack of money, hunger, and sexual appetite.

Heroes fill up the city parks through which you drag yourself.
They praise virtue, abnegation, cold bloodedness, conception.
At night, if there's fog, they open bronze umbrellas,
or retire to the volumes of sinister libraries.
You love the night for the power of annihilation it entails,
and you know that when you sleep the troubles release you from dying.
But the gut wrenching waking up proves the existence of the Great Machinery,
and it replenishes you, small one, facing the undecipherable palm trees.
You walk among the dead and you talk to them
about the matters of future times and the issues of the soul.
Literature has ruined your best hours of love.
By the phone you wasted a lot, much time to sow.
Prideful heart, you are in a hurry to confess your defeat,
and to delay collective happiness for a different century.
You accept rain, war, unemployment, and unfair distribution
because you can't, alone, blow up the island of Manhattan.

José (*José*, 1942)

What now, José?
The party is over,
the lights turned off,
everyone has vanished,
the night turned cold.
What now, José?
What now, you?
You who are nameless,
who mock other people,
you who write verses,

who love, who protest,
what now, José?

You are without a woman,
without a discourse,
without any affection,
you can't drink anymore,
you can't smoke anymore,
spitting you can't anymore,
the night turned cold,
the day didn't come,
the tram didn't come,
the laughter didn't come,
didn't come the utopia,
and everything is over,
and everything ran away,
and everything is covered in mold,
what now, José?

What now, José?
Your sweet word,
your instant of fever,
your gluttony and fasting,
your library,
your gold mine,
your glass suit,
your incoherence,
your hatred – what now?

With a key in hand

you want to open the door.
There is no door.
You want to die in the sea.
The sea is dry.
You want to return to Minas.
Minas is no more.
José, now what?

If you shouted,
if you groaned,
if you played
the Viennese waltz,
if you slept,
if you sang,
if you died,
but you don't die,
you are harsh, José.

Alone in the dark,
like a feral animal,
no theogony,
no naked wall
to lean up against,
no dark horse
that can run away in a gallop,
you march, José!
José, where to?

The flower and the nausea (*A rosa do povo*, 1945)

Stuck on my class and some pieces of clothing,
I go in white through the gray street.
Melancholy, merchandise linger.
Should I pursue until I feel sick?
Can I, weaponless, revolt?

Dirty eyes on the tower's clock:
No, time did not arrive from complete justice.
Time still is shit, bad poems, hallucinations, and wait.

Poor time, poor poet
melt in the same deadlock.

In vain I try to explain myself. The walls are deaf.
Under the skin of the words there are chords and codes.
The sun solaces the sick and doesn't revive them.
The things. How sad things are
emphasislessly considered.

To vomit this boredom over the city.
Forty years and no problem
solved, or even proposed.
Not one letter written or received.
Each man returns home.
They are all less free, but carry newspapers,
and spell away the world, knowing that they are losing it.

The crimes of the earth, how can one forgive them?
I took part of many, and hid many more.
Some I found pretty, then I published them.

Delicate crimes that help us to live.
Your daily ration of mistake, distributed right at home.
The evil bread makers from hell.
The evil milk makers from hell.

To burn it all, including myself.
The boy from 1918 they used to call "anarchist".
But my hatred is the best of me.
With it I save myself,
and I give a minimal hope to few.

A flower blossomed in the street!
Go by but from afar, tram, bus, river of steel of traffic.
A flower still pale
fools the police, ruptures the asphalt.
Be in complete silence. Cease business.
I guarantee, a flower blossomed.

Its color you can't perceive.
Its petals are unopened,
Its name is not in the books.
It is ugly. But indeed a flower.

I sit on the ground of the capital of the country at five o'clock in the afternoon
and slowly I touch this insecure form.
By the mountains, solid clouds gather.
Small white spots move in the sea.
There is panic among the chickens.
It is ugly. But it is a flower. And pierced through the asphalt and the boredom
and the disgust and the wrath.

Solace at the beach (*A rosa do povo*, 1945)

Come on, don't you cry.
Childhood is lost,
youth is lost,
but life hasn't been lost yet.

The first love went by,
the second love went by,
the third love went by,
but the heart keeps going.

You lost your best friend,
you haven't attempted any traveling,
you don't have a house, a ship, a land,
but you have a dog.

Some harsh niceties
in soft words struck you.
Never, never healed.
But how about *humour*?

Injustice won't be solved.
By the shadow of a wrong world,
you whispered a shy protest.
But others will come.

Adding everything up, you should

throw yourself all at once in the water.
You are naked in the sand, in the wind.
Sleep, my child.

To love (*Claro enigma*, 1951)

What can a creature,
among creatures, but to love?
To love and forget,
love and mislove,
love, dislove, love?
Always, up to piercing eyes, to love.

What can, I ask, the loving being
in universal rotation, except
to rotate as well, and love?
Love what the sea brings to the shore,
what it buries, and what in the sea breeze
is salt, or love's precision, or simple nausea?

To love solemnly the palms of the desert,
what is the giving of self, or expectant aspiration.
And to love the inhospitable, the harsh,
the vase without flowers, the iron floor,
and the moveless chest, and the street seen in a dream, and a bird of prey.

This, our destiny: love countless,
distributed through the insidious and void things.
Unmeasured giving to a complete ungratefulness.

And, in the empty shell of love, the shy, patient search
of more and more love.

To love even our lack of love. And in our drought,
to love the implicit water, and the silent kiss, and the unquenchable thirst.

Source: Carlos Drummond de Andrade, *Reunião – 10 livros de poesia*, Rio de Janeiro: José Olympio Editora, 1976 (7ª. edição, introdução Antônio Houaiss): “O amor bate na aorta” (p. 33); “Não se mate” (p. 40); “Necrológico dos desiludidos do amor” (p. 41); “Elegia 1938” (p. 59); “José” (p. 70); “A flor e a náusea” (p. 78); “Consolo na praia” (p. 116); “Amar” (p. 174).