

Seven Brazilian Poets: Cecília Meireles, Torquato Neto, Waly Salomão, Paulo Leminski, Antonio Cicero, Maria Ester Maciel, Adriano Espínola

Translations and Commentary: Charles A. Perrone

Motive

I sing because the instant exists;
and my life is complete, I know it.
I dwell not in sadness nor in bliss:
I'm a poet.

Brother of things one cannot seize,
I feel neither torment nor delight.
I'm passing through days and nights
in the breeze.

Should I tear down or should I grow?
Should I undo or should I maintain?
—no, I don't know. If I shall remain
or if I'll go.

I know I sing. And song is all things.
Blood eternal have rhythms on wings.
I know one day my voice will stay yore
—nothing more.

Motif

I sing because this moment exists;
full and complete is my life.
No happy summit nor sad abyss:
A poet am I.

Brother of all things fleeting,
I've neither frowned nor grinned.
I send a day and night greeting
in the wind.

Will I remain constant or will I stray?
Will I be building or will I undo?
I simply don't know. Don't know if I'll stay
or pass through.

I know that I sing. And song has it all.
Rhythms with wings flow at its core.
And one day I know I'll no longer call:
—nothing more.

Motivo

Eu canto porque o instante existe
e a minha vida está completa.
Não sou alegre nem sou triste:
sou poeta.

Irmão das coisas fugidias,
não sinto gozo nem tormento.
Atravesso noites e dias
no vento.

Se desmorono ou se edifico,
se permaneço ou se desfaço,
—não sei, não sei. Não sei se fico
ou passo.

Sei que canto. E a canção é tudo.
Tem sangue eterno a asa ritmada.
E um dia sei que estarei mudo:
—mais nada.

Cecília Meireles (1901-64) was an outstanding voice of the second generation of Brazilian Modernism. “Motivo” is one of her signature pieces; it is from *Viagem* (Voyage, 1939). My two renderings of the poem were prepared for the First International Meeting of Brazilian Women Writers, New York (2009). They were also presented by Prof. Sérgio Alcides during a lecture at Dahlem Humanities Center, Institut für Romanische Philologie, Lateinamerika-Institut; Peter Szondi-Institut für Allgemeine und Vergleichende Literatur, Freie Universität Berlin, April 2014.

Cogito

I am as I am
 an inalienable
 personal pronoun
 of the man I initiated
 in the bounds of the impossible

I am as I am
 as for now
 no great abiding secrets
 no secret or biting news
 at this hour

I am as I am
 present
 unlocked and indecent
 like a piece of myself

I am as I am
 eyes that portend
 and I'm living in peace
 every hour of the end

Cogito

eu sou como eu sou
 pronome
 pessoal intransferível
 do homem que iniciei
 na medida do impossível

eu sou como eu sou
 agora
 sem grandes segredos dantes
 sem novos secretos dentes
 nesta hora

eu sou como eu sou
 presente
 desferrolhado indecente
 feito um pedaço de mim

eu sou como sou
 vidente
 e vivo tranquilamente
 todas as horas do fim.

Torquato Neto (1944-72) was a poet, lyricist and journalist. He was one of the key voices of the now internationally-known Tropicália movement in MPB (Brazilian Popular Music). "Cogito" is his signature piece; it has appeared in his collected poems and numerous anthologies in Brazil.

Ars Poética Operation Clean Up

I.

*Saudade** is a word
Of the Portuguese language
Whose spate and flow
I am always against
Saudade is a word
To be banned
From common usage
From colloquial expression
From the constitutional congress
From dictionaries
From onomasticons
From epistolary practice
From tombstones and epitaphs
From geographical charts
From popular songs
From phantasmatic bodies
From the map of affection
From the shores of poetry
Not to leave alluvial
Deposits
Here
On this river bank.

II.

Sudden
Sur - reptitious anaconda
Repressed is resplendent
Meta-more so beautifies
Self mortifies
What seemed a brauna tree
Perchance a boulder of tar

SCINTILLATES

Re – newed snake sheds the shell
Of old skin

SIBILATES

III.

Saudade is a word:

The sun of years and the salt of tears.

**saudade*: longing, yearning (for someone); "memory imbued with longing"; fond remembrance; nostalgia, homesickness. James L. Taylor, *Portuguese English Dictionary*

I.

SAUDADE é uma palavra
 Da língua portuguesa
 A cujo enxurro
 Sou sempre avesso
 SAUDADE é uma palavra
 A ser banida
 Do uso corrente
 Da expressão coloquial
 Da assembléia constituinte
 Do dicionário
 Da onomástica
 Do epistolário
 Da inscrição tumular
 Da carta geográfica
 Da canção popular
 Da fantasmática do corpo
 Do mapa da afeição
 Da praia do poema
 Pra não depositar
 Aluvião
 Aqui nesta ribeira.

II.

Súbito
 Sub - reptícia sucurijuba
 A reprimida resplandece
 Se meta-formoseia
 Se mata
 O q parecia pau de braúna
 Quiçá pedra de breu

CINTILA

Re-nova cobra rompe o ovo
Da casca velha

SIBILA

III.

SAUDADE é uma palavra
O sol da idade e o sal das lágrimas.

Waly Salomão (1943-2003) was a poet, lyricist and cultural agitator, originally from the state of Bahia. The present “Ars Poética Operation Clean Up” is a revised (1986) version of a periodical manifesto (1983). The epigraph—gloss of a word often cited as untranslatable and very frequent in song—was added by the translator to replace a citation from the Renaissance Portuguese poet, Sá de Miranda.

KAI

Minimal temple,
for a kind of smallish god,
on guard for you here,
instead of my painful self,
my extreme vanguardian angel.

What mask do your
boastful sorrows fancy,
what’s but vainglorious
vacancy in your story.
whoever might know.

It’s quite enough, I find,
the body drawing away
the shadow left behind.

KAI

Mínimo templo
para um deus pequeno,
aqui vos guarda,
em vez da dor que peno,
meu extremo anjo de vanguarda.

De que máscara
se gaba sua lástima,

de que vaga
se vangloria sua história,
saiba quem saiba.

A mim me basta
a sombra que se deixa,
o corpo que se afasta.

Paulo Leminski (1944-89) is widely regarded as the leading voice of his generation of poets. He also composed several popular songs, one of which was recorded by superstar Caetano Veloso. "KAI" is from *Distraídos Venceremos* [Distracted we shall overcome] (1987).

Keeping

Keeping something is not to conceal it or leave it under lock and key.
Nothing at all is meant for keeping in coffers.
Offers in safes are being lost from sight.
Keeping something is to look at, after, and up to it,
to guard and regard it, that is,
to illuminate it and be illuminated by it.
Keeping something is to watch over it, that is, to remain vigilant for it,
that is, to stay awake for it, that is, to be for its sake before and after.
That is why one better keeps the flight of a bird
Than birds without flights.
That is why one writes, one speaks, one publishes,
That is why one declares and declaims a poem:
To keep it:
So that it, in turn, may keep guarding its keepsakes:
May keep whatever a poem keeps:
That is the deal with poems:
That keeping whatever wants keeping.

Guardar

Guardar uma coisa não é escondê-la ou trancá-la.
Em cofre não se guarda coisa alguma.
Em cofre perde-se a coisa à vista.
Guardar uma coisa é olhá-la, fitá-la, mirá-la por
admirá-la, isto é, iluminá-la ou ser por ela iluminado.
Guardar uma coisa é vigiá-la, isto é, fazer vigília por
ela, isto é, velar por ela, isto é, estar acordado por ela,
isto é, estar por ela ou ser por ela.
Por isso melhor se guarda o vôo de um pássaro

Do que um pássaro sem vôos.
Por isso se escreve, por isso se diz, por isso se publica,
por isso se declara e declama um poema: Para guardá-lo:
Para que ele, por sua vez, guarde o que guarda:
Guarde o que quer que guarda um poema:
Por isso o lance do poema:
Por guardar-se o que se quer guardar.

Antonio Cicero (b. 1945) is a distinguished essayist and poet from Rio de Janeiro, also known for his song lyrics. "Guardar" (1996) has been considered a stellar late-century lyric instance. He recited this poem and several others, some with explications, in the original and in translation, at a special session of the January 2016 convention of the Modern Language Association in Austin, Texas. The last part of the presentation was recorded and posted to the internet. The poem and translation had previously appeared in Austin within an installation at the MexicArt Gallery as part of an exhibition of Brazilian visual poetry (2002). The youtube video No. is: 927-g9A6Tz8.

Elegy

There are mineral remains
in your absence: something
that without yet being here
stays: a slice of crystal

unseen but glistening:
a transparent solidity,
an elegance of stone, light
of what's lost and what's not.

There are musical remains
in your absence: something
secret and resonant alike:

crystal syntonization
syllables of yes in
the silence of here and sound.

Elegia

Há um vestígio mineral
na sua ausência: algo
que sem estar ainda
fica: fatia de cristal

que não se vê e brilha:
 solidez em transparência
 elegância de pedra, luz
 do que é perda e não.

Há um vestígio musical
 na sua ausência: algo
 que é sigilo e ressonância:

sintonia de cristais
 sílabas de sim no
 silêncio do som e do aqui.

Maria Ester Maciel (b. 1963) is a college professor, scholar of film and letters, and creative writer from the state of Minas Gerais. An earlier version of this “Elegy” was presented at the 2009 Poetics Symposium at Northwestern University.

A Kapok Ceiba

In the upper Amazon
 in vegetation so dense
 the silk-cotton tree's on.

Roots tabular flare
 as immense as harps with
 their strings taut and tense

shooting out in pairs.
 Disguised as a bogeyman
 the poet now strikes them

with his heels held square
 to bring close the sound
 of chiaroscuro melody

in the afternoon found
 the lament of the earth and
 the vertiginous air

when up there on high
 the storm can't but roar
 as chainsaws on the ground.

A Sumaúna

No alto amazonas
entre matas densas
a sumaúma assoma.

Raízes tabulares
imensas feito uma
harpa de cordas tensas

se lançam aos pares.
O poeta disfarçado
de curupira bate

nelas os calcanhares
pra fazer ressoar de
perto a melodia

clarescura da tarde
o lamento da terra
e a vertigem dos ares

quando lá nas alturas
ruge a tempestade
e no chão a motosserra.

Adriano Espínola (b. 1952) is from the Northeastern state of Ceará but has lived in Rio de Janeiro for thirty years, where he has established a reputation as one of the leading voices of his generation. His lyrical epic *Taxi or Poem of Love in Transit* appeared in translation in New York in 1992, and he has participated in many national and international anthologies. “A Sumaúma” is from 2010.

Music and Poetry in Brazil: Ever since the Portuguese established themselves in the New World in the early sixteenth century, verse-making has been associated with musical expression. The most prominent Baroque poet, Gregório de Matos, was also an accomplished troubadour. Numerous Romantic poets also penned song texts for national composers, as did several poets of the Modernist period. In the nineteen-sixties and beyond, a whole series of songwriters were known as poet-composers, like Bob Dylan in the USA, and numerous poets doubled as lyricists. Throughout the twentieth century, and into the twenty-first, poets explored musical themes and metaphors in measured forms and free verse. The present selection spans nearly eight decades and features poets / poet-lyricists

from several different states of Brazil. The present selection could be nicely enhanced by the inclusion of such musically inclined poets as Ricardo Aleixo, Beatriz Azevedo, and Geraldo Carneiro, all of whom have spoken/performed in the United States.