

PODCAST – “LA BIBLIOTECA”

Hispanic Division, Library of Congress

An exploration of the Library’s collections that focus on the cultures of Spain, Portugal, Latin America, and the Hispanic community in the US.

SEASON 1/Episode 3

Listening to Carlos Drummond de Andrade

Introduction

Talía Guzmán-González: Bom dia, Catalina! Tudo bem?

Catalina Gómez: Tudo bem, Talia, obrigada. E você?

TGG: Eu estou *ótima* Catalina, obrigada! Welcome everyone to *La Biblioteca*, or for today’s episode *A biblioteca*, the podcast of the Hispanic Division at the Library of Congress. I am Talia Guzman Gonzalez and I am here with my colleague Catalina Gomez, who I just greeted in Portuguese!

CG: Today we’ll be listening to an excerpt from a recording of one of Brazil’s best known poets: Carlos Drummond de Andrade.

TGG: Drummond is one of those poets that everyone loves. Whether you read him on the original Portuguese or in translation, he is an author that appeals to everyone. And to talk with us about Drummond we have invited professor Vivaldo Andrade dos Santos from Georgetown University who wrote a book on Drummond titled *O trem do corpo: Estudo da poesia de Carlos Drummond de Andrade*, which translates to *The Train of the Body: A Study of the Poetry of Carlos Drummond de Andrade*. Vivaldo Andrade dos Santos is the director of the Portuguese Program at Georgetown, and his areas of expertise, besides Carlos Drummond de Andrade, are Brazilian literature and Latin American Avant-garde poetry. He also teaches courses in Brazilian cinema and Brazilian popular music.

And like today’s featured author, Vivaldo is mineiro, meaning that he was born in the state of Minas Gerais. Carlos Drummond de Andrade was born in Minas, Brazil in 1902. He wrote more than thirty collections of poetry, including *A rosa do povo* (The Rose of the Nation) (1945), *Lição de coisas* (Lessons of Things) (1962), and *Corpo* (Body) (1984). He also wrote works of prose, including essays, short stories, and thousands of *crônicas*, which a short literary form often focusing on daily life, that were initially published in newspapers. His literary work is so revered in Brazil, that the government released a 50-cruzeiro bill bearing his portrait and one of his poems. Besides writing, Drummond served as a civil servant for the Department of Education, the Ministry of Education and Public Health, and the Patrimony of National History and Arts Office. He was a prolific journalist and editor for several newspapers. He died in Rio de Janeiro in 1987.

CG: Excellent, well, let's jump to our interview with Vivaldo!

TGG: Vamo la! Let's go...

Interview with Vivaldo Andrade dos Santos

TGG: Oi, Vivaldo, tudo bem?

Vivaldo Andrade dos Santos: Oi, Talía, tudo bem. Obrigado. Bom dia!

TGG: Bom dia! We're so excited that you are here today. We're just greeting each other in Portuguese. How are you, Vivaldo?

VAS: I'm good. Thank you.

TGG: Excellent. Today we'll be talking about Carlos Drummond de Andrade, one of Brazil's most beloved poets

CG: I have to say Vivaldo, I'm really excited to learn about Drummond de Andrade today in this podcast. So what can you tell us about Drummond?

VAS: Well, thank you – first of all – for the invitation; and for me it's a pleasure to talk about Drummond. Drummond, as Talía said, he's the most well-known poet from Brazil 20th century, and he was born in a small town of the state of Minas Gerais, in the southeast part of Brazil, in a small town called Itabira in 1902. He lived there until the age of, I think in his 20s he moved to the capital of Belo Horizonte, the capital of Minas; and in the 1930s, 30... 1932... I think 1934, he moved to Rio to work as a secretary of the Minister of Culture during the Vargas regime. He lived there until he died in 1987. So as Talía reminded me, this will be the 30th anniversary of his death.

CG: Thank you so much.

TGG: Thirty years without Drummond... Most of the recordings that are included in the Archive of Hispanic Literature on Tape were done right here in this studio in Washington, D.C. where we are right now. However the recording of Drummond you will be talking about today – like several other Brazilian authors, including Manuel Bandeira, one of his friends and contemporaries – was done in the Library of Congress's overseas office in Rio de Janeiro on July 29th, 1974. That is new information I found out today, and it was pretty amazing.

You chose today three poems from the poet's Recording of the Archive to read and discuss with us. Let's begin with the first one, the first poem; and would you like to talk a bit about why you chose this poem for this reading?

VAS: Yes, I chose “Os ombros suportam o mundo,” “You Carry the World on Your Shoulders.” This is a poem published in 1940 in *Sentimento do mundo*, (*The Feeling of the World*), that is a rough translation. There are several translations of Drummond’s works but not the complete works. This is 1940. It’s very special, in terms of his life as a poet because it’s a book that kind of shifts from his early two books, *Alguma Poesia* (Some Poetry), and *Brejo das Almas* (Swamps of the Soul); one was published in 1930, the second one in 1934, and *Sentimento do mundo* in 1940. 1940 is very symbolic in terms of what’s going on in the world, in the context of the Civil War in Spain in 1935, and the beginning of the Second World War – 1937-45. That’s very important in terms of how what’s happening effects or kind of changes Drummond’s perspective about poetry. And this is a poem that to talk about it I have to kind of refer to the early poems, the first two books especially, that are very self-centered, very funny books, kind of poem-jokes and anecdotes, and also has a lot of... very self-centered, talks a lot about his origins in the state of Minas Gerais, tradition, and kind of very cynical in term of his poems. In 1940 when he published “You Carry the World on Your Shoulders,” I said there’s a shift. In the sense that Drummond kind of opens himself to the world. He’s very sensitive to what’s going on in terms of the world, in terms of... not just Brazil per say – Brazil is under the dictator of Vargas, Getúlio Vargas – but also the world, as I said. So his poetic persona of the voice is more of a kind of search for a universal kind of love.

- **[Excerpt] Brazilian poet Carlos Drummond de Andrade reading “Os ombros suportam o mundo”. (Archive of Hispanic Literature on Tape, Library of Congress, 1974)**

VAS: This is a translation by Richard Zenith on Drummond’s “You Carry the World on Your Shoulders”

- **[Excerpt] Brazilian author Vivaldo A. dos Santos reading Drummond’s “You Carry the World on Your Shoulders” translated by Richard Zenith.**

TGG: That is excellent. It is precisely what you were saying about him, right? I mean there’s live as it is there are no mysteries. However, when I read him I’m like some things are very mysterious to me, right? I mean he says “you carry the world on your shoulders and it weighs no more than a child’s hand,” I mean... you have this opposition of the world being this burden, but at the same time it isn’t, I mean how much can a child’s hand weigh? Or maybe it does weigh a lot, I don’t know, the responsibility of carrying a child.

VAS: Yes, I think you’re right. There’s kind of an acceptance of life, but at the same time there is a sense of responsibility. Even if you’re alone, what is the weight of a child’s hand, it’s the lightest thing, but it’s so powerful and has so much... the acceptance of life without mystification, it’s an acceptance of taking a position. It’s not just like escaping to some utopia or through suicide, for example, or addiction – as he’s mentioned, or love – in a sort of infatuation to escape reality through love. Just accepting life as it is, but there is a responsibility in that. I think it’s more.... It’s very common in Drummond, it’s more of the responsibility to live for oneself; in terms of you’re not following what your friends or the politics are

saying, or the world, but there is a sense that you have to find and lead the urgency to accept life and accept life yourself. It's something that comes from inside you.

CG: Great. Well that was a wonderful poem. Thank you.

TGG: I think you chose a second poem for us to read today. It's "José" if I'm not mistaken. "José"

VAS: "José"

CG: Wish I could pronounce it that way...

TGG: You can practice.

CG: "José"

VAS: "José" this is from 1942, from his book called *José. José*, the book, is a collection of 12 poems and only 12 poems and it's a very symbolic and very powerful, and very lyric book. Most of the poems, in comparison or in contrast, to *Sentimento do mundo* the one that was published before in 1940. This one if you mention *Sentimento do mundo*, the Feeling of the World, is something that opens up to the world. *José*, Drummond goes back to the South, it's a very individualistic in some sense, but it's a very elaborated; it's a lot of thinking about the self. But not just self in the selfish sense; but thinking about the self or individual in the modern city, in what's going, in the terms of the experience of living in a large city like Rio, for example. So "José" is a classic poem by Drummond.

- **[Excerpt] Brazilian poet Carlos Drummond de Andrade reading his poem "José" in Portuguese (Archive of Hispanic Literature on Tape, Library of Congress, 1974)**

CG: That's beautiful. We don't have with us a translation of this poem, so maybe if you could tell us what is happening here? Who is José? What is going on?

VAS: Yes, "José" is a very powerful poem, in the sense that Drummond kind of, assuming... I don't know if José was the persona, José is asking José; but José can be the self, you know, poet himself. Just to contextualize, it was published in 1942 and he's leaving Rio. The whole book is about leaving in a city and living in an apartment and being alone and what's the experience of someone coming from a small town of Brazil, and live in the large city with the crowd and the multitude and feeling alone. So in the whole book, there is a sense of a loss. It's a whole reflection on life, on modern life. What does it mean for someone like Drummond, to grow up in the countryside, amongst family and friends, moving to a city? Especially coming from a small town, traditional, there's a lot of communication, family and friends, and going to a city and feeling like you don't know anybody. You just live by yourself, you just feel alone.

TGG: I want to move to the third poem "O lutador" because this is an interesting poem in comparison with "José". It's on the same vein, probably, but what I like about this one is the relationship between

the poet and his craft.

- [Excerpt] Brazilian poet Carlos Drummond de Andrade reading his poem “O lutador” in Portuguese. (Archive of Hispanic Literature on Tape, Library of Congress, 1974)

CG: That was wonderful. That was Drummond Andrade reading his poem in 1974

TGG: “O lutador”

VAS: With Drummond it’s important also to think about modern poets and poetry in terms of... poetry is done something that comes from inspiration or feeling; you just wait for inspiration to come. You know? There’s a lot of work in writing. So Drummond is describing this, there is some sort of inspiration but there’s a lot of work to be done. For the metaphor of the fighter, as he says “to fight with words is like a fight in vain,” it’s useless, but you fight. Because, you know, words for him – the object of his poetry – is something that every day in order to write the poem you have to fight, you have to try and grasp and to catch that word. The word is fighting him, you know, and also, for him, the word is not just a word, but the meaning of writing – it’s like food as a poet. You have to think words are very important for a poet because it’s the food for his life...

TGG: It sustains him.

VAS: It sustains him, yes.

TGG: I wanted to take this opportunity that you’re here, right since you wrote a book about Drummond, right? If you could tell us a little bit about your work on Drummond, you have a book titled *O trem do corpo: Uma leitura da representação em Carlos Drummond de Andrade*. Could you tell us a little bit about your book?

VAS: Oh sure, this is a book that was based on my PhD dissertation and there’s so many books written about Drummond because he is a well-known poet. So one thing for me when I was writing my dissertation was revising my book but what called my attention was the importance of the body of his poetry, and so for me the body was not just for the self, but the realization that you have a body, like a person and how that changes through time.

CG: What can you say about what it means to listen to a poet versus reading him? And specifically Drummond, what can you tell us about his voice?

VAS: I think it’s great that you guys have the recording of his poems because Drummond, I think, had very few recordings on Drummond. And first he’s personal; he’s very private, very private in his own life and he’s not a person in the public. He was a poet, but he never liked to be on the spotlight. To have records of, especially this group of poems, I think it’s very important of someone that never wanted to be a celebrity. But it’s very nice to listen to him

TGG: I think before we go, we would like to ask you one last question. If you could have a *cafezinho*, if you could have coffee with Drummond this afternoon, what would you like to talk to him about?

VAS: I would love to have coffee with Drummond! Today, unfortunately, he's gone. But if anybody goes to Rio there is a statue of him in Copacabana, he lived in Copacabana, so anybody that goes to Rio sits next to his statue to take a picture, maybe they'll be grabbing a cup of coffee or a beer. But I think Drummond – as I said – he's like the main Brazilian 20th century poet, but if you want to trace him throughout the 20th century, from 1930 to the 1987. So you will see a lot of his poetry was always addressing what was going on in the world. I would talk to him about the '30s and the '50s in Brazil, and what's going in Brazil these days, but also in terms of politics and the world. But I think Drummond... I always liked him because I think he's a poet that never left Brazil, except for going to Argentina to visit his in-laws... but his sense of poetry, it's not per say like... you know there are things about Minas, Brazil, but his poetry kind of transcends Brazilian literature and Brazilian territory in terms of just like the poems about the war, and poetry about poetry. One thing that for me is very important in Drummond's poetry is his being; he's very modern, very aware of modernity. He's addressing all these changes in society. The modernization now... we experience the whole idea of what going on in the world in terms of the environment, for example. But Drummond is writing these things about the 1940s and '50s, he's already very aware of the impact of modernization; in terms of mining in Brazil, you know, what's the impact of mining? There were laws then but what's going to happen to the land, the land itself? What's the meaning of modernization? Why do we need, all the time, to be inventing things? And of course he celebrated this, but there is a sense of loss...

CG: Questioning it a little bit, yeah.

VAS: So I think I would talk about that. People from my state, we have a reputation of not being very talkative, so I don't know how the conversation will go. A lot of silence, but I'm sure I'll talk to him about another thing; besides poetry it would be *cachaça*, the Brazilian sugarcane rum. Because he's from Minas and I know a lot about *cachaça*, I'm sure Drummond knew about *cachaça*, I'm sure his family produced several of the Brazilian rums. That could be a topic for another conversation.

TGG: We need to have a conversation about *cachaça*, then in the future.

VAS: Well Drummond as I said he's not just been well-known, he's celebrated. We don't have in Brazil like a National Poet, we don't have like Neruda or Fernando Pessoa in Portugal, like national; like this state and how they view this idea of a national poet. Drummond he just became this, people just love him, because he wrote a lot of long poems, also he wrote a lot of, what's called, the *crônica*, the chronicle daily, or short stories. He was really renowned for that. But also in Brazil he became one of the dollars, the Brazilian money bills in 1986.

TGG: Oh yes. One of his poems is on one of the bills.

VAS: in 1986 or '85 there was a school of samba called *Samba da Mangueira* a school of samba that celebrated his poetry. It was beautiful; they interpreted his poetry. He was already not feeling well with

his health. But just to understand his popularity, anybody from the upper class to the lower class might not to really know him but they know some verses; they know who Drummond is.

TGG: Well, thank you so much for being here with us and for talking about the *poeta do povo*, it seems. And we'll see you around D.C. for sure!

VAS: Thank you.

CG: Thank you Vivaldo this was wonderful. Thank you!

VAS: Thank you.

Thank you for tuning in! To listen to **this author's** entire recording visit our website at www.loc.gov. You can find the Archive of Hispanic Literature on Tape by clicking on our "Digital Collections" and selecting "Audio Recording" collections category, or by going to the Library's Hispanic Division's website www.loc.gov/rr/hispanic. ¡Hasta pronto!