

A RENOVAÇÃO NAS POESIAS ERÓTICAS DE CARLOS DRUMMOND DE ANDRADE AND RONALDO WILSON

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RESUMO

Este artigo apresenta uma encenação intertextual incomum de dois poetas eróticos cujos escritos se cruzam e às vezes se dividem, tematicamente e temporalmente, para desafiar nossa compreensão da liminalidade do erótico. Eu examino a poesia erótica de Carlos Drummond de Andrade em *O amor natural* (1992), e *Poems of the Black Object* (2009) e *Narrative of the Brown Boy and the White Man* (2008) de Ronaldo Wilson, para entender como o corpo é utilizado para abranger a identidade. Mostro como a incorporação do corpo como fonte de expressão na poesia pode ser lida como transgressora, especialmente nessas poesias.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Poesia erótica. Ronaldo Wilson. Carlos Drummond de Andrade. Poesia pós-moderna. Poesia moderna brasileira.

What happens when an epitaph gets engraved on a *bunda*? Or when thick shiny blood is observed as coagulating on a pair of underwear? *Bunda*, the Brazilian Portuguese word for “buttocks,” reveals its full poetic value as a place of potentiality that links sexuality to identity. In erotic poetry, inner and outer worlds frequently converge on the body and create landscapes ripe with expression. If sexuality is vital to the process of identity-making, as Perrone (2003, p. 197) suggests, then the language of erotic poetry is a site of creation. In this article, I examine the erotic poetry of Carlos Drummond de Andrade in *O amor natural* and Ronaldo Wilson’s *Poems of the Black Object*, *Narrative of the Life of the Brown Boy and the White Man*, to understand how the body is used to explore liminality

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and identity. How does black post-modern erotic poetry reinvigorate the erotic poetry of the late renowned Brazilian modernist poet, Drummond, and collectively question our notion of aesthetics in poetry and culture today? When we put contemporary raw homoerotic poetry in dialogue with shy late 20th century hetero-erotic poetry, what surfaces in these texts?

This article presents an uncommon intertextual staging of two erotic poets whose writings intersect and divide at times, thematically and cross-temporally, to challenge our understanding of the erotic's liminality. I show how the incorporation of the body as a source of expression in poetry can be read as transgressive, especially in these pieces. What are the affordances of a naked transgressive language and language that describes naked transgressive moments? In a Bakhtinian spirit of grotesque realism, I compare the use of bodies and their fluids, in these poetries, as a vehicle for continuous identity construction through rejection, repurposing and/or renewal of the self. What might the use of the body in these two very different poetic pieces suggest about love, sexuality, race and identity? I argue that while each poet approaches questions about identity via sexuality in different ways, Drummond and Wilson's erotic poems share a similar search for truth in the form of the body, each inverting high culture and opening up conversations about wonder, shame and nostalgia.

The erotic poems of the late Carlos Drummond de Andrade (1902-1987) could in fact be read as a transgressive epitaph he inscribed on the body of his own life's work to which we, as readers, breathe each time we get lost his poems. Drummond grew up in a rural town in the southeastern state of Minas Gerais, Brazil. Born to an affluent family in 1902, Drummond followed the script for a man of his time in his social sphere, working as a public servant in the city of Belo Horizonte – where he gathered more inspiration for his other parallel world in which he existed as modernist poet. Drummond's free-verse poetry contemplates the quotidian in a way that not only resonated with the Brazilian public at the time but also laid the foundation for a poetic universe which he could transgressively expand upon in his erotic poetry unveiled after

transcending. A more contemporary lyrical voice who takes a similarly dive lingers in into the mundane to linger is the award-winning North American poet, Ronaldo Wilson. His bold poetries reflect intersections of race, class and sexuality as they relate to identity – specifically what it means to be a black, queer twenty-first-century poet doing individual and collective-conscious reconstructive work. To examine the erotic poetries of a white heterosexual Brazilian poet in the same daylight as a black gay American poet requires a deeper understanding of what it means to be transgressive, both in form and content. Acts of transgression in poetry are relative to the socio-historical context from which they emerge. What exactly is transgressive in a poem about receiving fellatio? What happens if we divorce the poetic voice from the author's gender? And does the poem's transgressive quality dull in a society where sex sells and is seen as filling a void? A closer look at the history of philosophical views on human sexuality will help delimit the transgressive spaces Wilson and Drummond inhabit in their poetry.

From the times of the ancient Greeks, eros has been a source of inspiration, contemplation and admiration amongst humans who have had the luxury to ponder it at length and describe chasing it. Eros seems to embody the forces driving man's conflicting aims: instinct, desire, beauty and transcendence. Alan Soble identifies this rising tension within the idea of eros, from the erotic poetry of Sapphos (ca. 610-580 BCE), to Plato's Republic and Aristotle's ethics. With the influence of Christianity so came Eros' evolution from crude and vulgar to heavenly and spiritual and man's declaration of the body as a space to be controlled, the outer reflection of a person's inner world, making beauty at once clean and chaste. In these ancient reflections on sexuality, the rhetoric adopted to control populations and promote virtue-seeking, not sidetracking through temporal bodily satisfaction, as the most fruitful use of time. The surest bet to our freedom and happiness insisted on the pursuit of wisdom and virtuosity. Soble (2009) points out that in Plato's writings, homosexual love is not rejected for its unnaturalness but rather for its equally distracting misappropriation of time and energy. The gradual inversion or aversion to

the natural corporality of our human existence paralleled the path to some distant modernity.

Despite the two thousand years that separate the birth of Christ from the published erotic poetry collection of Drummond's, *O amor natural*, many of the same taboos surrounding bodily contact, especially between men and women, still existed in the imagination of Drummond. This is exemplified in occasional verses about the quotidian in Drummond's not-so-erotic poetry. These portraits of modern city life reveal a universe that expanded for young Drummond as he left his rural hometown and discovered the many bodies he would encounter as he joined a larger world in the city. A line from his poem, "Poema de Sete Faces" (1930) echoes Drummond's inner world full of limits from his own experience of being a child raised Catholic in the early twentieth century: *O bonde passa cheio de pernas: / pernas brancas pretas amarelas. / Para que tanta perna, meu Deus / pergunta meu coração / Porém meus olhos não perguntam nada.* The reference to the mysterious legs provides an early notion of what transgression might have looked like for a poet like Drummond. Long coats and stockings are a literal and very physical manifestation of the boundary that could be transgressed in small doses, glimpsing the bits of ankles and calves of women on the cable car in the city. What is forbidden, for Drummond, is of high erotic value. In a 1984 interview, Drummond acknowledged his fascination with *pernas* as part of his greater fascination with the modern world:

Heading to Belo Horizonte as a young man, with a dangerous notion of a woman, and finding there a useful vehicle to collect information—the streetcar, where in order to board the car women, against their will, had to show a bit of leg. That was delicious, at least for a person from the interior of state such as myself [...] It's like a savage that goes to the city and find all these machines, these resources of civilization: it scares one; we would become scared before so many legs. I won't even mention the thigh, that couldn't be seen by any means. I considered the word "thigh" highly erotic.

Drummond's capacity to imagine is shaped by the barriers, both internally and externally imposed, that formed his purview. For Drummond, no matter how small the transgression, the intensity of the energy released was still strong. Even transgression depends on limits, then, and while the starting point may not be shared by all, it is always clear to the transgressor. The forbidden fruit that inspires much of *O amor natural* has medieval roots, where the erotic realm is associated with mysticism, as scholar Maria Lúcia Pazo Ferreira argues in her dissertation. Repression is key to Drummond's ability to speak to both the human suffering that results from sexual repression and the wild imagination that such repression produces.

Is the type of repression that gave rise to Drummond's erotic frontiers outdated or not reflective of Brazilian society's attitude toward sexuality? The Dutch filmmakers of the documentary about the erotic poems published in *O amor natural* suggest that it may be. In the film, *O Amor Natural* (1992), senior citizen residents of Rio are asked to read one of Drummond's erotic poems aloud. Some reflect on the poem, many blush and their silence fills the space opened up by Drummond's free verse. An older man, aware of his alpha presence, proudly reminisces about the many women he "conquered" over the years, while the younger women in his family serve him drinks and encourage him to talk. The audience witnesses the power and pleasure found in the release that Drummond's erotic poetry is for many literate senior *Cariocas*. While the documentary transgresses by inverting the notion that sex is for young people only, it also highlights the limitations of Drummond's transgressive poetry. In the beginning of the documentary, the filmmakers hit the streets and they ask around the vendors in a marketplace if they know who Drummond is. A fruit stand worker tries to politely engage the interviewer but reveals that he does not know who Drummond is and declines to read by offering a banana to the interviewer. The awkward stretch of silence that follows in the scene lasts only a few seconds on camera but it highlights the fact that although some consider Drummond to be Brazil's finest poet, there is still a class barrier that is not readily transgressible for all to enter the

erotic poetic universe of an erudite Drummond. This moment in the documentary grounds, the ethereal experiences described in Drummond's erotic poems and opens an unsolicited discussion of class, pleasure and leisure when the lovemaking ends.

From a very privileged position in society, Drummond worried about the reception of his erotic poetry. Was that because of his track record leading up to *O amor natural*'s publication? Santa'Anna (1992) attempts to address this tension between ethics and aesthetics in Drummond's posthumous publication in an article included in the sixth edition of *O amor natural*. Sant'Anna (1992, p. 84) explores the conflict between making the private (however imaginary) public – for a celebrity poet – and encourages the reader to reflect on this conflict before dismissing *O amor natural* as pornographic. Drummond himself admitted his apprehension about his erotic poetry ranking at the kindergarten level with the abundance of pornography in the eighties. Revisiting his poems about *bundas* nearly forty years after publication, could Drummond ever have believed his erotic poetry would be compared to pornography?

Drummond's ability to open up intimate moments of shared contact with language, sometimes playfully, other times nostalgically, demonstrate his ability to capture the many forms of human expressions unlocked through the transgressive act of attempting to speak the ineffable. In “*A bunda, que engraçada,*” the poetic voice animates the bunda: “Não lhe importa o que vai pela frente do corpo. A bunda basta-se. Existe algo mais? Talvez os seios. Ora — murmura a bunda — esses garotos ainda lhe falta que estudar.” This playful fusion of body and language gives life to a *bunda* that knows its own value in the world. In another poem, “*Era bom alisar seu traseiro marmóreo,*” the *bunda* is marbleized and the poem describes what it was like to sand the stone and love in another way. The *bunda*, in Drummond's erotic poems, is often a place where destiny is fulfilled with the inscription of an epitaph, the site where subjectivity and objectivity are suspended in a new lookout point: *Era amargo sentir em seu frio traseiro a cor de outro final, a esférica renúncia/ a toda aspiração de amá-la de outra forma/ Só a bunda existia, o resto era miragem.* Despite Drummond's openly

admitted aversion to homosexuality, the subject/object recognition in a *bunda* found in his erotic poetry can be read as transgressing an imposed homophobic barrier, finding truth “the color of another ending” that link love, truth and the *bunda* in a new transgressive way. Could Drummond’s poetry have also unintentionally painted a rainbow on a *bunda*?

Pazo Ferreira (1992) argues that the eroticism in Drummond’s work has a mythical grounding and distances itself from pornography. Drummond himself guided Pazo Ferreira’s dissertation about his poetry, sending her recommended supplemental readings to defend his case that his eroticism was not pornography in an effort to perfect his epitaph. The poems collected in *O amor natural* span Drummond’s lifetime, though the specific date of each poem’s composition is not included in the publication. During the dissertation writing process, molded by Drummond, Pazo Ferreira had access to the unpublished potentially erotic poems. This raises the question of privilege, power and self-representation performed privately in an intense effort to both exculpate himself and immortalize his published and unpublished works. Drummond had a reputation to maintain, even long after his death. Though frequently described as shy, Drummond’s command of how to write good poetry was not (ZENITH, 2015, p. xi), nor were his efforts to preserve whatever dignity might be lost in the excess of an erotic poetic release which he himself could only allow for after he had passed.

The relevance of positionality, then, is important when describing Drummond’s ability to “safely” erotically transgress through his poetry after his death. Sant’Anna (1992) describes *desnudamento temático* or ‘thematic naked-undoing’ as a strategy for poets to connect with their readers, themselves and that mystical space Drummond seems to enter. This safe transgressive mode is a luxury that not many poets who undertake the risk of *desnudamento temático* have. Wilson (2008), for example, will show us what *desnudamento temático* looks like for a black queer poet who builds his reputation as he undresses his identity. It is only toward the end of Drummond’s career that the poet begins to undo the irony that masks eroticism and go beyond snippets of legs to undress a more full-bodied

experience of love, according to Sant'Anna. In his examination of the *desnudamento temático*, which sets *O amor natural's* incorporation of love apart from love in Drummond's previous work, Sant'Anna (1992, p. 83) echoes Drummond's poetic voice caught in an orgasm: "O amor é o que há de imperioso na vida, é o momento luminoso na escuridão, a afirmação da vida contra a morte, a procura da eternidade no fugaz instante".

So, is it the act of sex itself that Drummond felt shy about or the awareness involved in being observed as the author of the sex-act poem? Is getting naked poetically the same as getting naked sexually? If so, the poetic voice in Drummond's erotic poetry undoes itself thematically to a climax, even if the topic is always/only superficially sex.

Drummond's erotic poems echo the twentieth-century philosopher Nagel's view on human sexuality that posit an element of self-awareness as both subject and object in sexual attraction (SOBLE, 2009). For Nagel (1969), perversion involves a sexual act which negates the dual-reciprocity involved in sexual arousal. This leads us to consider pornography: is it perverse because it deflects the subject-object recognition that a sexual arousal between two individuals would typically involve? Without the opportunity to see ourselves as objects attracting another subject, does the search for eternity in the flesh, the affirmation after death, divert at this very juncture to distinguish pornography from eroticism? If so, does that mean that the reader can see himself as subject and object in erotic poetry? This casts the body as a stage in (erotic) poetry, and Drummond's posthumous poems will have transgressed safely to shore for the self-conscious renowned poet.

According to Sartre (1956), only when the body, the most real encapsulation of ourselves that we have, is "past" does it reveal its truths to us and its essence to others. Blau (1991, p. 77) discusses the "liberated economy of the unconscious, the seeds of the psyche's history spilling over the stage, confounding representation and, in the play of body parts, disrupting the hegemony of the specular with oral drives, anal drives, labial, olfactory, epidermal, duodenal," as the physical materialization of what he calls, "the surpassing body". Out come the

fluids in Drummond's erotic poems. Or do they? In many of the poems included in *O amor natural*, references to the scatological are indirect: an "húmido subtarrâneo da vagina" or a the sight of a fleshy *bunda* is as deep as Drummond takes us into a Bakhtinian release. Imagination, though, in *O amor natural*, picks up where the fluids vanish in the flesh of the text. Bakhtin (1998) understood that the fluids and excess that occur at the body's apertures surpass its limits and allow it to exist outside of itself for growth. Aesthetically speaking, when there is a release in literature, what does the growth look like? Bakhtin's theory of language, which came to be known as "translinguistics," proposes that meaning is created through a dialogic process of exchange, echoing Derrida who claimed that meaning is made in relation to other voices, that this ludic polyphony can lead us to laughter, neologisms and transgression (WILSON,1986). This suggests that transgression and narrative are interdependent, and that the carnivalesque play in language needs the moral and linguistic codes for creation. In this way, language, sexuality and identity become linked when we understand the tensions created by encounters with 'the other' who, in turn, respond to us as necessary for innovation.

The poetic voice that expresses the orgasmic death in the poem, "*Amor—pois que é palavra essencial*" captures the idea of conquest after the moment when dual subject-object reciprocity has past. Read as such, do we all die each time we encounter a poem, as it impresses itself upon us and then see ourselves reflected in it? If so, the way we experience an erotic poem is different from the way we experience pornography, then. Unlike pornography, the poem allows the audience to recognize some aspect of their inner world outside of themselves, fostering a connection between the poetic voice, the self and the mystical universe Drummond inscribes in his eroticisms.

If reading Drummond's erotic poetry or reading poetry in general is like making love – to the poem, ourselves and the universe – is that harmonious relationship between subject and object jaunted by the image of a young man preying on an older one in the locker room after a swim in a pool of phlegm? Two and half generations later, Ronaldo Wilson's *Poems*

of the *Black Object* take us to a less romantic side of erotic poetry, where the power at play in the relations between lovers is without makeup or masks. Kristeva (2012, p. 104) claims that the “passage of thought into suffering and eroticism [is] the essence of the sacred, religion’s takeover aside”. The notion of a surpassed body, or what Kristeva (2012) calls the *abject*, then, implies death and the expulsion of refuse as an essential part of the life force that is growth.

In queer erotic poetry, the performance of the abject on the body is not only necessary for growth, but as Muñoz (1999, p. 4) defines in *Disidentification* it is also a “survival strategy a minority subject practices to negotiate a phobic majoritarian public sphere that continuously elides or punishes the existence of subjects who do not conform to the normative citizenship”. Wilson’s poetry forcibly inverts public and private spheres to play with the possibilities for a newly constructed black identity. In a 2010 interview, Wilson describes the space between dream and wakeful state that inspires his prose and poetry, along with deep reflections on what it means to be a contemporary black, gay poet who is not afraid to reveal aspects of himself through his writing – overtly transgressing Drummond’s advice in a public lecture to not write about things that happen in real life: “What are the poetics of the black body suggested in the realization of one’s self as the excised, exploded and then re-configured? [...] what are the ways that one imagines are revised self that detaches into pieces whose embodied fragments mark the process of its own new becoming?” (WILSON, 2012 p. 9 *apud* GREENBERG, 2012, p. 9).

This is what writing from the margins requires as it does not have the amenity of a reputation to uphold; identity begins as something shattered and dejected, the abject. “Writing avant-garde poems about the African-American experience is not exactly a career choice: the genre of poetry is itself marginalized; avant-garde writing is marginal within that margin; and African-American poetry (and poetry by anyone of color) is marginal within the margin.” (GREENBERG, 2012, p. 9). Greenberg (2012) wrote in a review of Wilson’s poems, many of which he composed while completing his doctoral degree at CUNY. This hyper-marginalized

space from which Ronaldo Wilson's transgressive poetry speaks reflects not only Bakhtin's notion of realism but also the idea of an identity that is co-constructed through encounters with the other – between poet and reader, passengers on the subway and lovers, reaching across the limits of race, gender, and class.

In part three of *Poems of the Black Object* (2009, p. 39), “Breaking Black,” Wilson's lyrics take the reader through nineties' hip-hop, 9/11 and Shakespeare in “Breakers' Pose” and “Ariel Freeze:” “Do I Flame Amazement?/ Do I not creep/ here, my head/ shaken?”. Breaking the brown skin on the black body, the erotic in Wilson's poetry surpasses the body on an unconscious level linking pop-culture, the Renaissance, love and pornography to the “black object.” The black body Wilson writes puts Bakhtin's translinguistics on parade in a way that even erotic modernism's constraints could only celebrate in the next lifetime.

Drummond admitted in an interview with then doctoral student, Maria Lúcia Pazo Ferreira, that his transgressive poetry still had clear limits (ANDRADE, 2012). When asked about an unpublished erotic poem inspired by the mythological Jupiter who fell in love with a boy—a poem he shared with Pazo Ferreira for her research, Drummond declared his disgust for homosexuality and his general lack of poetic or real-life interest in homosexuality (Drummond). While Drummond transcends as both subject and object in the waist of lover, half a century later Wilson is picking up the pieces of broken subjectivity, observing himself through the process of creation as both subject and object. By making himself and his black identity the subject of his poems, the topic of Wilson's homosexuality cannot be avoided. Does that make Drummond's wholeness perfected in the act of lovemaking disintegrate when juxtaposed with a fractured Wilson describing the black man who waits on the public toilet for visitors looking for a receptive mouth?) Might it suggest that identity-making is more complex for doubly-marginalized subjects and that this process resorts to all of Bakhtinian realism to make something whole out of something broken?

Sexuality is just one boundary that can be transgressed in different directions. While Drummond writes about sexuality with adulation, Wilson's un-decorative language does not attempt to mask the physical and psychological pain of living in the quotidian abject. Masks serve less purpose when writing from the margins of the margins, there is less literary face to be lost. Wilson's poetry reflects a nakedness and rawness in both language and form sacred that make the process of *desnudamento temático* more transparent and express. Social taboos are always present, but erotically writing against them through linguistic and thematic literary transgressions is of benefit not only to others in the margins. Wilson's poetry reveals how raw and unanswered the pieces of black identity he examines still are. His lyrics function as a fractured mirror in which the audience glimpse some of themselves at times. With the tugs of power under negotiation in Wilson's quotidian, the constant pull to transgress dangerously into territory that makes people squirm is an act of survival rather than an attempt at mystical transcendence. Butterman (2005) examines the influence of the French Philosopher George Bataille's erotic writings from the 1960s as they relate to cultural oppression and revolution:

The erotic is envisioned as the unspeakable, unrepresentable space where a subject is entrenched in contemplating the experience of orgasm and the moment of death as parallel [...leading to] the ambivalent feelings that result from performing transgression: intense pleasure evoked due to crossing of boundaries, coupled with extreme anguish once the subject realized the oppressive nature and incredible force of the boundaries that he has worked to transcend.
(BUTTERMAN, 2005, p. 10-11)

In violating social and literary codes, and speaking to the unspeakable, sexual transgression in literature can open up a discussion of social and political critique. To describe excretion and appropriation in literature is to speak of expulsion and love as the pathway to what Bataille (1998, p. 274) called the "sacred". Writing into the world of the erotic,

then, is to enter into a charged space ripe for revolution and possibilities for truth finding. This takes Drummond's approach to erotic poems to a whole new level, one where the transgressor could not have imagined the new dimension of the universe they unlocked, the ambivalent place where pleasure and pain co-mingle to produce a social commentary on identity in the form of a Ronaldo Wilson poem.

In Drummond's "*Era Manhã de Setembro*", a *membro* is being kissed, not by a humble slave but by a queen, on a September morning where time seems to stand still in the poem. Birth and death recycle through images of quiet waves, waterfalls and flora and fauna to be conquered in the swirl of the poetic "I"'s dominion. The empire's expansion in the poem associates a traditional idea of love in which one must succumb to the force of an inner drive to be destroyed in order to be resurrected through the other. Though this poem depicts a phallogocentric universe, the concept of death as a necessary process for renewal is present. Here, the poem suggests the giver needs the receiver just as much as the receiver needs the giver in order to be repurposed. The poetic "I" focuses on his dominion and the object becomes incorporated into the subject. Much of the unspeakable in the erotic poetry of Drummond goes beyond coital sex, which again suggests that Drummond's universe was open for expansion. The many references to fellatio, cunnilingus and the ubiquitous worshiping of the *bunda*, though romanticized, highlight an awareness of the connection between self-realization and sexuality, which distinguishes his erotic poetry from pornography.

Drummond's poetry dances around moments of bodily release and corporal exchange, which can be read as strategy to sing rather than speak the unspeakable. But from which transgressive limit does that singing and dancing strategy result— the personal or the poetic, or both? Perrone (2003) explores the relationship between eroticism and lyricism in the context of Brazilian poetry. He points out the linguistic limitations all writers of the erotic face at the moment of creation: getting past the "dichotomy of the vulgar and the hygienic" choices for terminology in talking about the body. Perrone (2003) looks at the hybrid poetic tools

at play in what he calls “material poetry” that seeks to “consummate aesthetic differentiation in sexual / erotic spheres – to achieve an othering [through] the physicality of language, grapho-alphabetic manipulations, spatialization, chromaticism, visual objects” (p.198). In material poetry, when the body and text are one, the relationship between the signifier and the signified can be playful and meaningful. If human sexuality is linked to the process of identity making, in poetry, semiosis is linked to the infinite forms of the human experience. Drummond’s poetic universe is ever-expanding, but it is worth noting that its limits are determined from the subject outward.

In Drummond’s erotic poetry, *O amor natural*, traces of the experimental forms in poetry in 1930s Brazil can be detected. Drummond’s erotic poems were not only transgressive in terms of their content, but also, their form. In “*Bundamel Bundalis Bundacor Bundamor*,” the interplay between body as text and text as body displays a playful *desnudamento temático* that bears fruitful neologisms:

Bundamel bundalis bundacor bundamor
 bundalei bundalor bundanil bundapão
 bunda de mil versões, pluribunda unibunda
 bunda em flor, bund em al
 bunda lunar e sol
 bundarribil
 Bunda maga e plural, bunda alem do irreal
 Arquibunda selada em pauta de hermetismo
 opalescente bun
 incandescente bun
 (ANDRADE, 1992)

Again, the *bunda* is of high erotic value, a place of magic-making rooted in possibility. It is a site of refuse but also site of imagination, excretion and appropriation. After so many prefixes of *bunda*, the fireworks of the cosmic “*girabundo*” explode in a bang as the poem progresses. If in Drummond’s other erotic poems the *bunda* is a final destination or lens to

see one's self after death, in *Bundamel*, the *bunda* is a building block in a kaleidoscopic universe.

Moving out of the bedroom, Ronaldo Wilson's erotic poetry engages the reader on a different level, where the body opens up a house full of fragments to a deconstructed universe. Wilson's *Poems of the Black Object* (2009) is a collection of prose poems that transgress into the scatological and push into the pornographic to make statements about race, sexuality and class in contemporary U.S. culture. Wilson's first book of prose poetry, *Narrative of the Life of the Brown Boy and the White Man* (2008), is a similar reflection on the shame, desire and pain that run through the lived experience of intersectionality. Both collections of poems were published shortly after Wilson completed his Ph.D. in English at CUNY. *Narrative of the Life of the Brown Boy and the White Man* won the 2007 Cave Canem Poetry Prize (selected by Claudia Rankine) leading to opportunities to publish *Poems of the Black Object* within a short span.

The first of the six sections in *Narrative of the Life of the Brown Boy and the White Man* introduces the brown boy as the protagonist in the subsequent poems and places the white man as the Other who appears in the form of a lover-father-stranger throughout the collection. "In the red house are a brown boy and white man. They hate each other. It smells clean. Love is the smell of their hate [...] There is a different stink in the clear house [...] the smell from the brown boy and white man eating and shitting there [...] The brown boy gets what he wants. The white man gives the brown boy whatever he asks for" (WILSON, 2008, p. 3). Race and codependence are experienced through all the senses in Wilson's poetry, giving each description a raw but still warm quality. The white man is both lover and father and structures the brown boy's world, and while the poetic voice declares that he feels true love for the white man, a desire to kill this lover is acknowledged. Could this be similar to what the "ela" performing fellatio in *Era manhã de setembro* is feeling? We'll never know for sure. Drummond's erotic poems are written in the voice of the *conquistador*, and the object of the poetic voice's affection are muffled in moans at most, suggesting that romance and objectification are quite

complicit. The white man and the brown boy do not exist in the same “house,” yet the power structure in their relationship is acknowledged and understood by both. The perspective of the one being “fed,” then is what most distinguishes the poetic voices between Drummond and Wilson, and Wilson gives voice and power to the brown boy through his acute awareness of his position in his environment.

How exactly does Wilson’s poetry get naked? To start, the poetic voice takes the reader on a tour through the clear house. On the brown boy’s wall a collage juxtaposes a crying Serena Williams being consoled by her sister, Venus, with the fat cocks of old men in Wilson’s poem, “Serena William, Whiteness, and the Act of Writing:”

When he thinks of the connection between his sad sister and his turned-on old men strangers caught sucking and being sucked, and covered, he feels that his mind is one confused object that pulses about unknowing, wound up, a note toward itself with no answers but the need to cut, suspend, look. Paste, cover, and tape [...] What if he could have her powerful torque, unleashing and winning against all that booing at Indian Wells? Still, he finds himself, while swimming, shaking his head forward and to the left, his fingers brushing aside an imagined blonde slick of chlorine water-logged hair, stuck then freed from in front of his eyes. The quiet of this pictured the smoothed down curls that he palms down to his grown up head remind him, again, of who he is, and who he is not.

(WILSON, 2008, p. 27)

Wilson’s *desnudamento temático* can be seen in the choice of language used to describe the inner complexity of being gay and black and acknowledging an attraction to older white men. In the poetic universe Wilson patches together, the seams frame both subject and object; his poetry explicitly engages the reader in his metapoetic commentary on process, rather than on the frontier conquered in modernist lines. Wilson depicts the image of a collage on a wall, reflecting a subjectivity that is hybrid, enigmatic and anguishing. When the poetic voice looks at the

images of faces on the wall, there is a moment of suspended recognition that lingers. What does it mean to find connections in the images on a covered wall and see one's self?

The 2014 Companhia de Letras edition of *O amor natural* includes six epitaphs: one on sex as a jar of wonders, from Walt Whitman's "A Woman Waits for Me," an excerpted verse from Camões's *Os Lusíadas* commenting on nature's generosity and abundance, a line from Ronsard's *Sonnet pour Hélène*: "vivre sans volupté c'est vivre sous la terre," an excerpt on the endless search for passions' origins from a Pedro Salinas's *Poesía Junta* and one from Apollinaire. It seems that the imaginary of canonical writers of the erotic have opened the circle to include Drummond. Wilson's epitaphs reflect thinkers whose voices and images echo throughout his poetry. *Poems of the Black Object* opens with a quote by Toi Derricotte "Perhaps [race] is a state that floats back and forth between us, as if our body and soul were kept apart, like a kind of Siamese twins, joined only by the thin chord of desire," followed by a contemplation of the black body by Frantz Fanon: "I took myself far off from my own presence, far indeed, and made myself an object. What else could it be for me but an amputation, an excision, a hemorrhage that splattered my whole body with black blood?" To write from the erotic in the presence of the "black object," means to also write from the underground, the debris and the underside of passions. Desire in Wilson's poetry is deeper than flesh even as it dances on the body's surface. deeper than flesh even as it dances on the body's surface.

Intertextual references in the vast erotic hinterlands of Drummond's poetry point to the divine and nature mainly in the form of metaphor and comparison, and race is delinked from the sexploration. Wilson's digressive queer erotic poetry dialogues with contemporary racial discourse in the U.S. – ruminating on Serena Williams' reception at Indian Wells to which Claudia Rankine's dreamplay, *Citizen: An American Lyric* (2014) also responds. Wilson's erotic universe is cross-temporal and complex, and his experience of race shapes his ruminations and self-perception. The "white man," appears in a truncated naked form, encouraging the brown boy's projects, giving him room to do his cut-and-paste work, while the brown

boy's need to assemble is an unexplained drive that delimits his identity. The love between the old white man and brown boy is surrounded by incongruent representations of blackness.

Perloff (2010) observed that the reimaginings performed by postmodern artists means recontextualizing modernist canonical works. If Drummond's modernist erotic poetry concerns itself with an inward looking search for truth that expands through sexuality, keeping intertextuality to the sacred, Wilson's poetry breaks down any preconceived notion of truth, questioning the romantic relationship between love and the body, pressing "*o natural*" to its component parts as his truth takes him in and out of the body. Rather than a mystical out of body sexual experience, Wilson's poetries provide more of a vertiginous isolated vantage point to approach the erotic. Drummond's erotic poetic sphere remains mostly closed off from society, while the erotic energy seeking connection in Wilson's poetry is constantly thwarted by other objects the body in his poems encounters in a crowded poetic landscape in its quest for pleasure. This unexpected angle for truth-finding occurs at the boundaries into which Wilson's poetry cuts deeply to expose aspects of a complex intersectional existence. Race, gender, sexuality and thus identity-making happen between bodies in Wilson's poetry, making room for rich intertextuality that reflects a complex, hybrid subject.

A stab wound on an older white man's ass continues to bleed in "The Black Object's Memory," and the poetic voice digresses into a reflection on violence that goes unnoticed in white spaces while in black spaces it is constantly trying to be washed away. This poignant prose poetry then enters a public toilet:

You remember that his beard is thick and nappy. You'd say there was a certain kind of sexiness both in his face and his decision to spread out on the toilet, the thick bud of his black dick in his hands [...] Another part of you thinks that the urinal next to him is like a small boat, in it, a sea of urine [...] 'You're gonna get sick,' When you say this, you want to lift him up and carry him out to some clean river to soak, watch the rings of filth float from his body. But you also want to piss on him.

You want to unload on his beautiful black beard what you give to the
urinal's mouth, a radiant stream splattering on his dim and tired lips.
(WILSON, 2009, p. 16-17)

The public restroom is a space assigned various meanings in Wilson's poetry: a release of waste, a place for nourishment desperately lacking and where dirt (to be avoided) and cleanliness (to be sought) compete. The poetic voice in Wilson's poem above echoes the ambivalence described by Bataille when a threshold has been crossed; there is a release, a recognition that the desire to nourish is a conflicted one—it recognizes the man on the toilet as both an object to be exploited (which would allow for subjectivity to be asserted) and a subject for whom empathy is felt.

In his discussion of modernism and the toilet, Ian Todd reflects on what Anne Yaeger and Anne McClintock theorize about dirt “which has historically signified differences of race, gender and class in order to pose such questions as ‘what do we do with bodies and experiences that fall outside these categories – that refuse the category dirty-clean?’” (TODD, 2012, p.195). For writers like Wilson, the bathroom is not just a new place for sexual encounters; it is another invitation to recognize other identities to both exploit and restore them. In the end, the poetic voice in the poem decides not to feed the mouth in the bathroom once a good look at the floor is taken and the smell of the abject becomes overwhelming. The black on black encounter in the dirty bathroom does not lead to a mutual sublimation in the end. While the linguistic register adopted by Wilson for his poems is vulgar, his poems are not so much pornographic as they are graphic. There is no modern-day hot sex scene à la Drummond. Instead, we find a complex web of hungry bodies that coexist in an alienated commodified world.

So what to make of all of Wilson's appropriation of vulgarity and references to bodies in excess? Shall we consider a release, a loss or deconstruction of the self to be renewed with the sight of the excess? And how exactly does the excess take on a value of triumphant survival as grounds for renewal? Dainotto's essay on “The Excremental Sublime”

posits that in order for any transformative imagination to change the narrative, there must first be a death. This death involves a relinquishment of previous fictive constructs, a scattering or breaking down of the self, followed by alienation marked by a dulling of the senses with a persistent drive to eat, and finally a return (DAINOTTO, 1993). If the toilet is the tomb and womb for the postmodern subject, as Dainotto (1993) suggests, we need to take a closer look at the excremental sublime in the poetics of Wilson and Drummond. For Drummond, the orgasmic release which transports the poetic voice to some mystical place resembles a Kantian definition of the sublime where the subject would “reconstitute the excess of feeling within the notions of ‘unity,’ ‘integrity’ and ‘coherence.’” (SANT’ANNA, 1992, p. 82). Dainotto (1993, p. 143) echoes Charles Altieri in his explanation of how the excrement sublimates positioning the postmodern subject “as a sphincter muscle performing its daily activity of retention, manipulation, and ex-pression”. This series of contractions and expansions leading to re-birth implies the process of movement as more important than the final product that is released. The path to the sublime in Drummond’s erotic poetry is less complex than in Wilson’s postmodern deconstructive poetic universe; both poets would likely agree that it’s more about the journey.

Just as Drummond’s erotic poetry could not have anticipated Wilson’s poetics of the black body’s objects, Wilson’s poems are not concerned with conquering truth on the body through love. In a sense, Wilson picks up where many canonical white men left off. Though the axis has changed over time, what is continuous between these two poets separated by time and space is the notion of the body as compass, as each author textually maps subjectivity. The erotic contributions of these two transgressive poets invite us to consider the limits that shape our experience of the world through bodies and language. Their bold aesthetic moves reflect two distinct cultural processes of becoming in the infinite realm of the erotic.

Looking at post-modern homoerotic poetry alongside modernist hetero-erotic poetry reveals that the uses for the erotic exceed the

boundaries of the domestic sphere. Erotic poetry the way Drummond might have imagined it, is enhanced and complicated by the layers that Wilson's homoerotic poetry invites. Black queer poetry such as Wilson's draws a peripheral experience of sexuality to the center in the world of poetry – a genre already marginalized within literary criticism. This distanced-existence within academic literary criticism itself is reflected in the very few number of critical works on the twenty-first-century poet. In bringing Drummond in dialogue with Wilson about the evolving nature of the erotic, the literary criticism produced in this work shows how the margins work their way to the center by turning inward.

What Brazil's beloved modernist poet might have found too unsettling to publish throughout his life comes tumbling down in poignant and painful prose in modernism's aftermath through Ronaldo Wilson's poetry. Each poet's *desnudamento temático* forces us to acknowledge the power and risk necessary for growth as creators – and the ambivalent tension between the relevance and irrelevance of language when it comes to erotic expression. Tracing unexplored textual links cross-temporally and geographically by examining transgressions in poetry enriches our discussions of what new uses of the erotic might look like. In different ways, Wilson and Drummond's erotic writings encourage us to resist culturally-imposed barriers and to write from our body.

REJECTION, REPURPOSING AND RENEWAL OF THE SELF: BODIES AS TEXTS IN THE EROTIC POETRIES OF CARLOS DRUMMOND DE ANDRADE AND RONALDO WILSON

ABSTRACT

This article presents a unique uncommon intertextual staging of two erotic poets whose writings intersect and divide at times, thematically and cross-temporally, to challenge our understanding of the erotic's liminality. I examine the erotic poetry of Carlos Drummond de Andrade in *O amor natural* and Ronaldo Wilson's *Poems of the Black Object* and *Narrative of the Life of the Brown Boy and the White Man*, to understand how the body is used to explore identity (re)construction. I

show how the incorporation of the body as a source of expression in poetry can be read as transgressive, especially in these pieces.

KEYWORDS: Erotic poetry. Ronaldo Wilson. Carlos Drummond de Andrade. Post-modern poetry. Modern Brazilian poetry

EL CUERPO RENOVADOR EN LAS POESÍAS ERÓTICAS DE CARLOS DRUMMOND DE ANDRADE Y RONALDO WILSON

RESUMEN

Este artículo presenta una puesta en escena intertextual poco común de dos poetas eróticos cuyos escritos se cruzan y a veces se dividen, temática y temporalmente, para desafiar nuestra comprensión de la liminalidad de lo erótico. Examinó la poesía erótica de Carlos Drummond de Andrade en *O amor natural* (1992), e *Poems of the Black Object* (2009) e *Narrative of the Brown Boy and the White Man* (2008) de Ronaldo Wilson y para comprender cómo se usa el cuerpo para explorar la identidad. Muestra cómo la incorporación del cuerpo como fuente de expresión en la poesía se puede leer como transgresora, especialmente en estas piezas.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Poesía erótica. Ronaldo Wilson. Carlos Drummond de Andrade. Poesía posmoderna. Poesía brasileña moderna.

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