Brazilwood Poetry Manifesto
Oswald de Andrade
Correo da Manhã, March 18, 1924

Journalist, playwright, poet, novelist, cultural critic, memoirist, polemicist, etc. OSWALD DE ANDRADE was born in São Paulo in 1890 and died in the same city in 1954. Between those dates, he lived a very eventful life. It is difficult to overstate his importance to the arts in Brazil. While he had his problems (like all male modernists), everybody who makes art of any kind in Brazil has to deal with him at some point.

Brazilwood (Pau-Brasil) is the name of Oswald’s first book of poems, brought out in 1925 by the Parisian publisher Au Sans Pareil, with a cover and illustrations by the great Tarsil do Amaral.

I have tried to reproduce Oswald’s famous telegraphic style, which has influenced generations of Brazilian writers, and have added a few footnotes, some of which which include my own observations during visits to Brazil, and one of which includes observations made by friends in Brazil. — Chris Daniels

Poetry exists in the facts. Saffron and ochre shacks on Favela Green under Cabraline1 Blue: aesthetic facts.


The story of the bandeirantes4 expresses the whole pioneering and commercial history of Brazil. The academic side, all those citations, all the famous authors. So impressive. Rui Barbosa5 top hat in Senegambia. All transforms into wealth. Of balls and fancy talk. Black women at the Jockey Club. Catumbi6 odalisques. Three-dollar words.

1 Refers either to Pedro Alvares Cabral, who “discovered” Brazil on April 22, 1500, or to Saca-dura Cabral (1881–1929), a Portuguese aviator who flew from Lisbon to Rio de Janeiro in 1922; the latter seems more likely.
2 At the time, a well-off beach-front neighborhood in Rio de Janeiro. Now not so well-off, but by no means a bad place to be. There’s a great used bookstore in Botafogo; I found some of absolute treasures there.
3 A kind of fish stew.
4 Originally slave-raiders; later gold hunters; did much to open inland Brazil.
5 Rui Barbosa de Oliveira (11/5/1849 – 3/1/1923) was an important Brazilian writer, jurist and politician. Abolitionist; life-long defender of civil liberties. His “fiat money” policies in the early 20th century led to chaos and economic instability. Unsuccessfully ran for President of the Republic in 1910 and 1918. In 1921, named a judge in the World Court, whence his nickname, “Eagle of the Hague”. Household name all over Brazil.
6 One of the oldest neighborhoods in Rio de Janeiro, 10 minutes from the Center. Now falsely accused of being more dangerous than other neighborhoods. Best salt cod croquettes ever at Bar
The academic side. Bad luck: the first White came to port and tamed the wild wilds with politics. The baccalaureate. We can’t help it, we’re educated. Country of anonymous ills, anonymous PhDs. Thus was Empire. We eruditize everything. We’ve forgotten gavião de penacho.7

Poetry never exported. Poetry hidden behind the malignant vines of the academy. In the lianas of academic yearning for the past.

But there was an explosion in our knowledge. Men who knew everything blew up like ballons and popped.

The turn to specialization. Philosophers making philosophy, critics criticism and housewives discussing on cuisine.

Poetry for the poets. The joy of those able to discover because they do not know.

Inversion of everything, invasion of everything: the theater of ideas and the onstage battle between the moral and the immoral. The thesis ought to be decided in a war of sociologists, men of law, fat and gilded as Corpus Juris.


Brazilwood poetry. Agile and candid. Like a child.

A suggestion from Blaise Cendrars.—Your locomotives are full, you better get going. A black guy turns the crank of the turntable you stand on. A little carelessness and you’re off in the direction opposite where you’re trying to go.

Against cabinetism, the cultivated praxis of life. Engineers, not jurisconsuls lost like Chinese bureaucrats in the genealogy of ideas.

A language without archaism, without erudition. Natural and neological. The millionary contribution of all errors. Like we talk. Like we are.

There’s no fighting in the land of academic vocations. There’s just those robes. Futurist or whatever.

Our sole struggle is the struggle for the way. Let’s make a clear division: poetry for import; Brazilwood poetry, for export.

de Bacalhau. The worst thing that ever happened to me in all my time spent in Brazil: someone laughingly corrected my pronunciation to avoid an obscene solecism.

7 Spizaetus ornatus, Ornate Hawk-Eagle, extraordinarily beautiful bird of prey; I wondered whether it symbolized strength, intelligence, nobility, beauty, ferocity, astuteness, the goodness and freedom of life in the wilds: “primitivism, without the slightest perjorative connotation; pre-European life; closeness to the local natural environment; Brazilians have forgotten how to be Indians in order to become pseudo-Europeans.” (Luis Dolhnikoff); “the animal, not locked up in the study; more free and uncertain” (Francisco Faria).
There's been a phenomenon of aesthetic democratization in the five knowing parts of the world. Institutionalized Naturalism. Copy. Pictures of sheep. Without real wool, they're no use at all. The definition in the oral dictionary of the Belles Arts Institutes: exact reproduction . . . With pyrogravure, young women became artists in every home. The camera appeared. And with every prerogative of long hair, dandruff and the mysterious genius of an eye turned in on itself — the photographer as artist.

In music, the piano invaded bare parlors with tear-off calendars on the wall. Every young woman a pianist. Up comes the barrel piano, the pianola. The Pleyel. Slavic irony composed for the Pleyel. Stravinsky.

Statuary lagged behind. The processions left the factories spanking new.

A poetry machine was never invented, but we already had Parnassianism.

So, the revolution showed us only that art had returned to the elites. And the elites started pulling it apart. Two phases: 1.) deformation through Impressionism, fragmentation, voluntary chaos. From Cézanne and Mallarmé, Rodin and Debussy, till now; and 2.) lyricism, the offering in the temple, the materials, constructive innocence.

Brazil, profiteur. Brazil, academic. And the coincidence of the first Brazilian construction in the general reconstruction movement. Brazilwood Poetry.

As the age is miraculous, laws were born from destructive factors’ very own dynamic revolutions.

Synthesis
Equilibrium
Automotive finish
Invention
Surprise
A new perspective
A new scale

Any natural effort in that direction is bound to be good. Brazilwood poetry.

The labor against naturalist detail — with synthesis against romantic morbidity — with geometric equilibrium and technical detail; against the copy, with invention and surprise.

A new perspective.

The other, Paulo Uccello’s, led to the peak of naturalism. It was an optical illusion. Distant objects didn't get smaller. It was the law of appearance. Now's the time to revolt against appearance. Revolt against copying. To replace visual and naturalistic perspective with another order of perspective: emotional, intellectual, ironic, ingenuous.
A new scale:

Revolt against the invader subject. Most unlike inevitability. The theater of ideas, what a set-up that was...monstrous. The novel of ideas, a hodgepodge. Historical painting, an aberration. Eloquent sculpture, a meaningless dread.

Our age proclaims a return to pure meaning.

A picture is lines and colors. A statue is volumes under light.
Brazilwood poetry is a Sunday dining room where birds sing in the condensed jungles of their cages, a skinny guy composes a waltz for flute, and Maria Luisa reads the newspaper. The present is all there in the newspaper.

There’s no formula for the contemporary expression of the world. See with open eyes.

Our base is twinned and actual — forest and school. The credulous, dualistic race and geometry, algebra and chemistry right after the baby-bottle and anise tea. A mixture of “sleep little baby or the boogey-man’s gonna get you” and equations.
A vision to encompass the cylinders of mills, electric turbines, factories, questions of foreign exchange, all without losing sight of the National Museum. Brazilwood.


The labor of the futurist generation was cyclopean. To set the imperial clock of national literature. Once this phase is reached, another problem arises: How can we be regional and pure in our own time?

The state of innocence replaces the state of grace which can be an attitude of the spirit.

The counterweight of native originality breaks down academic conformism.

A revolt against all the dyspepsias of academicism. The best of our lyric tradition. The best of our modern demonstration.

---

8 Any Brazilian thrush; but specifically Turdus rufiventris, sabiá-laranjeira (orange-tree thrush); Rufous-bellied Thrush; so beloved, for so long, by all the people of Brazil, that in the 1960’s it was made the national bird. It has figured in many famous poems and songs.