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Article

# Drummond, Reader of Stephen Spender: On the Philosophical Origin of “the Machine of the World”

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**Resumo:** Neste estudo apresentarei algumas evidências documentais de que o poema “A máquina do mundo” (1949), de Carlos Drummond de Andrade, foi pensado previamente a partir de algumas reflexões contidas num esquecido artigo de jornal intitulado “Poesia e Pesadelo” (1949). Nesse artigo, Drummond analisou criticamente algumas teses do ensaio de Stephen Spender, “What is Modern in Modern Poetry” (1948), então recém-publicado na revista *The Tiger's Eye*. Assim que leu o texto de Spender, Drummond escreveu “Poesia e Pesadelo” e começou a elaborar um poema narrativo cujo protagonista seria uma máquina. Todas as evidências documentais indicam que Drummond tomou as lições de Spender como pedras-de-toque para a elaboração da estrutura narrativa e alegórica de “A máquina do mundo”. Segundo a interpretação que ora proponho, Drummond, ao escrever o poema da máquina, pôs em prática, pelo menos, seis lições extraídas do ensaio de Spender, quais sejam: 1) o poeta moderno deve representar a tensão entre a paisagem maquinal exterior e a paisagem do mundo interior da imaginação criadora; 2) deve, também, representar de modo belo e poético o mundo maquinal, feio e urbano que o rodeia; 3) deve evitar os equívocos do excessivo visionarismo utópico, assim como o realismo rasteiro; 4) deve rejeitar o imperativo do engajamento político cujo princípio de ação afirma que a poesia tem uma missão transformadora na sociedade; 5) deve libertar-se da obsessão do verso livre como única forma da poesia moderna e passar a usar as formas fixas tradicionais; 6) deve compreender as máquinas como símbolos poéticos das paixões humanas, e não apenas como objetos exóticos e estranhos à realidade humana. A conclusão a que cheguei é que, após a leitura do ensaio de Spender, Drummond mudou sua compreensão estética e filosófica acerca do que define a essência da poesia moderna, tanto no que diz respeito à forma, quanto ao conteúdo.

Palavras-Chave: A Máquina do Mundo; Carlos Drummond de Andrade; Stephen Spender; Poesia Moderna.

**Abstract:** In this study, I will present some documentary evidence that Carlos Drummond de Andrade's poem “A Máquina do Mundo” [The Machine of the World] (1949) was based on prior reflections contained in a forgotten newspaper article entitled “Poesia e Pesadelo” [Poetry and Nightmare] (1949). In that article, Drummond critically analyzed some of the theses of Stephen Spender's essay “What Is Modern in Modern Poetry” (1948), which had just been published in *The Tiger's Eye* magazine. As soon as he read Spender's text, Drummond wrote “Poetry and Nightmare” and began to elaborate a narrative poem whose protagonist would be a machine. All the documentary evidence indicates that Drummond took Spender's lessons as touchstones for the elaboration of the narrative and allegorical structure of “The Machine of the World.” According to the interpretation I am proposing here, Drummond, in writing the machine poem, put into practice at least six lessons drawn from Spender's essay, namely: 1) the modern poet must represent the tension between the external machinelike landscape and the landscape of the inner world of the creative imagination; 2) he must also represent the machinelike, ugly, and urban world around him in a beautiful and poetic way; 3) he must avoid the misconceptions of excessive utopian visionarism, as well as creeping realism; 4) he must reject the imperative of political engagement, whose principle of action states that poetry has a transformative mission in society; 5) he must free himself from the obsession with free verse as the only form of modern poetry and start using the traditional fixed forms; 6) he must understand machines as poetic symbols of human passions, and not just as exotic objects foreign to human reality. My conclusion is that, after reading Spender's essay, Drummond changed his aesthetic and philosophical understanding of what defines the essence of modern poetry, both in terms of form and content.

**Keywords:** The World Machine of the World; Carlos Drummond de Andrade; Stephen Spender; modern poetry

## Introduction

On March 6, 1949, Brazilian poet Carlos Drummond de Andrade published a thought-provoking essay entitled “Poesia e Pesadelo” [Poetry and Nightmare]. The essay was featured in Section Two of the *Correio da Manhã* newspaper, in Rio de Janeiro, and was reprinted in São Paulo’s newspaper *Folha da Manhã*, on April 10, 1949. As with the poet’s other critical studies, the essay remained lost in the newspapers of the time without ever being compiled into a book. Drummond certainly never wanted the essay to be republished. And although we don’t know, by confession, the reason for his refusal, we can assume from the content of the essay why he never included it in one of his later books. It’s a very revealing text for an artist who wanted to keep the ideas behind his most enigmatic poem a secret. The content of the reflections therein became, over time, blatantly revealing of the way the poet thought about, prefigured and conceived the allegory of “A Máquina do Mundo” [The machine of the world].

“Poetry and Nightmare” is a critical review of a forgotten essay by Stephen Spender entitled “What Is Modern in Modern Poetry,” published in Issue 4 of the arts magazine *The Tiger’s Eye*, in 1948 (p.1-13). Drummond deliberately did not credit the title of the essay he reviewed. The implicit purpose of Drummond’s essay was to use Stephen Spender’s literary authority to subliminally criticize the poets of the Generation of ‘45. Drummond thought that the young poets of that generation had a misunderstanding of the aesthetic foundations of modern poetry. To suggest this misunderstanding, Drummond used Spender’s theses and arguments against the conception of pure poetry defended by the “novíssimos,” as those young poets called themselves. As the leaders of the Generation of ‘45 lived in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, Drummond published his essay in newspapers in both states.

Seven months after publishing “Poetry and Nightmare,” Drummond published the poem “The Machine of the World,” on October 2, 1949, again in *Correio da Manhã*. After the publication and reception of the poem, the poet realized that his essay had become an involuntary public confession about the philosophical origins of the allegory of the machine. When publishing “Poetry and Nightmare” Drummond could not foresee how Spender’s theses would give him insights for the subsequent elaboration of his most revered poem. Thus, the initial intention of the essay—to make a veiled criticism of the purist poetic program of the poets of the Generation of ‘45, using Spender’s arguments as counter-indications to pure poetry—became obsolete in the face of the poem’s realization. The reflections initially written as a critical comment on Spender’s theses became, months later, inconveniently revealing the aesthetic foundations that guided the poet in the creation of “The Machine of the World.” Hence the disappearance of this workshop essay of his.

It could have been included in *Passeios na Ilha* (1952), for example, but Drummond certainly thought it was of the utmost importance that those notes remained forgotten as a mere journalistic article. He intended, therefore, to restore the essay to the condition of a poetic workshop text exclusively—a trial-run, that is—morphing it into the format of a *calepino*, as the poet called his notes for the preliminary elaboration of “Relógio do Rosário” (1951). The success of this concealment is undeniable, considering that the confessions contained there have remained untouched and unknown by critics over the last seven decades. After searching books and articles from the Drummondian critical fortune, I found that no reference to it has been made to date, not even in the encyclopedic *Dicionário Drummond* (2023).

It is clear that my purpose in this brief study is to recover the forgotten essays by Drummond and Spender and, from this recovery, to elucidate the influence of the English essayist on the Brazilian poet in the elaboration of “The Machine of the World.” Drummond’s receptiveness to Spender’s witty reflections came at a time when he was in a deep creative crisis. That’s why the second purpose of my research, of no less importance, is to point out which lessons from Spender’s essay Drummond took as a precept for writing the machine poem. If we list these lessons, we will have six poetic prescriptions that were applied not only in “The Machine of the World,” but also in other poems in the book *Claro Enigma* (1951).

This research is important because it reveals and provides documentary proof that Drummond conceived the machinic allegory of his most revered poem from a dialog with a forgotten essay by

Stephen Spender. There are no previous studies investigating this dialog, although there are studies on the intertextual relationship between W.H. Auden's poem "As I Walked Out One Evening" and Drummond's "The Machine of the World" (ALMEIDA, 2021).

To achieve this, I have divided the article into five topics. First, I reconstructed the history of Spender's relations with Brazil. The reception of Spender's work by Brazilian literary critics throughout the 1940s and early 1950s was very enthusiastic, which led some Brazilian poets to invite the English poet to visit the country. Personalities such as Manuel Bandeira and Domingos Carvalho da Silva received Spender there. In order to recapture these events, which have been somewhat neglected by Brazilian and English literary critics, I set out to reconstruct the facts by consulting journalistic articles published in the main Brazilian newspapers of the time. Then, in a second topic, I translated Drummond's essay into English so that the English-speaking public would know it and be able to compare it with Spender's essay. In the third topic, I have supported the thesis that Drummond wrote "Poetry and Nightmare" with two rhetorical motives, agonistic and self-critical. Without an understanding of these two rhetorical motifs, the essay could be interpreted as a simple summary of the theses of Spender's essay. In the fourth topic, I have pointed out the six lessons Drummond learned from Spender's essay. The Brazilian poet used these in the elaboration of the narrative and allegorical structure of "The Machine of the World." In the fifth and final topic, I have shown how Drummond changed his aesthetic and philosophical understanding of what defines and characterizes modern poetry after assimilating the theses and arguments of Spender's essay. We can only understand this change in perspective fully when comparing Drummond's conception of modernism from *Alguma Poesia* (1930) the Drummond of *Claro Enigma* (1951). Influenced by this new concept of modern poetry, Drummond began to write poems in fixed and traditional forms, as well as discussing machinic, scientific (such as the theme of the "Lysenko Affair" in "Contemplation on the Bench") and self-critical themes.

### Spender in Brazil

The first question that comes to mind when reading Spender's and Drummond's essays is: Why did Drummond choose a text by Spender, and not by Auden, to comment on? After all, Auden was the most widely read and revered poet among the thirties, to the point where the group was called, by some, the Auden Group (CARTER, 1984). However, in the case of the Brazilian intellectual environment, Spender was, at the time, more recognized and studied than Auden, Day-Lewis, Isherwood and MacNeice. Throughout the 1940s and early 1950s, the young English poet's essays and books were cited and commented on in Brazil by Eugênio Gomes (1943), Victor de Sá (1945), José Condé (1947), Carlos Burlamaqui Kopke (1947), José Eduardo Fernandes (1947), Paulo Mendes Campos (1948), Ronald Mason (1948), Lúcia Miguel Pereira (1949), João Gaspar Simões (1951), T. R. Fyvel (1951), Vera Pacheco Jordão (1952), among others; the poems, in turn, were translated by Jacques do Prado Brandão (1947), Alexandra Ortopan (1952), Domingos Carvalho da Silva (1952), Bezerra de Freitas (1952), Péricles Eugênio da Silva Ramos (1953), Alexandre Herculano and Olívia Krähenbül (1952; 1953). Brazilian newspapers translated and published some of Spender's essays, such as "Walt Whitman and Democracy" (1944), "Edith Sitwell" (1945), "Soviet Realism" (1953) and the long and enlightening "Poets of My Generation" (1950), translated by Lúcio Bauerfeldt and divided into four parts in the Sunday editions of the "Letras e Artes Supplement" of *A Manhã* (Rio de Janeiro). Consulting the newspapers of the time, we realize Spender's books and articles, recently published in England, were immediately reported in various Brazilian periodicals; the most revered and cited of these works, *Poetry Since 1939*, was widely published in our periodicals and literature sections, and was referred to by national critics as the most authoritative text presenting the post-war English poetry scene.

In Brazil, Spender was loved by poets on the left-wing (for having volunteered to fight against General Francisco Franco in the Spanish Civil War and for being a master of the engaged poetry of the interwar period) and on the right-wing (for having taken a subjectivist turn in his poetry after the 1940s).

Spender's recognition in the Brazilian literary scene was such that he was invited to give lectures in Brazil in 1952. He landed at Congonhas airport at noon on November 20 and stayed until December 4. On the evening of November 21, 1952, he gave a "Poetics Course" at the Poetry Club with a lecture entitled "Concept of Poetry," held in the auditorium of the Municipal Library on Rua da Consolação. On November 22, he met with the president of the University of São Paulo, Ernesto Leme, accompanied on the occasion by Professor Leonard S. Downdes (of the Brazilian Society of English Culture and author of the book *An Introduction to Modern Brazilian Poetry*, 1954) and poet André Granja Carneiro. He also attended a cocktail party organized by the Brazilian Book Chamber on November 23, International Book Day, and was received by the governor of São Paulo, Lucas Nogueira Garcez, with the honors of "ambassador of English poetry" in Brazil. On November 25, at the invitation of the Poetry Club, he gave a lecture on the poetics of T. S. Eliot, D. H. Lawrence, and W. B. Yeats at the headquarters of the Brazilian Society of English Culture. He was accompanied by Domingos Carvalho da Silva and Cyro Pimentel and gave interviews to newspapers in São Paulo and, in Rio, to the Brazilian Press Association. The newspapers reported conferences in Santos, Campinas, and Piracicaba, as well as walks on Pernambuco Beach, in Guarujá, and receptions at the homes of people who are now unknown.

On November 26, he traveled to Rio de Janeiro (by car, a Studebaker, plate no. 3229, driven by Domingos Carvalho da Silva), where he was received as an official guest of the Ministry of Education, and gave a lecture the following day, in the auditorium of the Ministry of Education. On the same day, the poet Olympio Monat da Fonseca hosted a dinner for Spender at his own residence, welcoming as guests "only writers of the new generation" (*VEM DE AUTOMÓVEL*, 1952), certainly the young poets from *Revista Orfeu* and *Revista Brasileira de Poesia*. On November 28, he spoke to a large audience in the noble hall of Brazilian Society of English Culture, once again addressing the poetry of W. B. Yeats, D.H. Lawrence, and T. S. Eliot. On that occasion, Manuel Bandeira welcomed him and introduced him to the general public as a poet who needs no introduction (*YEATS, D. H. LAWRENCE*, 1952), comparing this reverence to the way Lorca introduced Neruda to the Spanish public in a similar ceremony. On December 1, again in the hall of the Ministry of Education, he gave the same lecture—"Concept of Poetry"—to the public of the then Federal Capital, Rio de Janeiro, this time in the presence of "various figures from the country's cultural circles, poets, writers, artists" (*STEPHEN SPENDER NO MINISTÉRIO*, 1952). On the afternoon of December 2, he visited the Brazilian politician Carlos Lacerda in prison, accompanied by writer Mário Pedrosa. He returned to London on December 4.<sup>1</sup>

Spender recorded his impressions of Brazilian poets in his personal diary, published late in 1986. On February 15, 1953, he pointed out that "in Brazil, where everyone is a poet, there are no poets." Spender assumed that Domingos Carvalho da Silva, Geir Campos, Péricles Eugênio da Silva Ramos and Afonso Félix de Sousa, among other "novíssimos" poets, were the leading representatives of Brazilian poetry. He never read the poetry of Carlos Drummond de Andrade, Jorge de Lima, Manuel Bandeira, and Cecília Meireles.

### **The Drummond's Essay**

#### *Poetry and Nightmare*

Stephen Spender, an English poet who fought for the Spanish Republic, recently analyzed the concept of "modern" in poetry.

The "modern" begins by existing in us, in our own minds, as a prime mover for certain artists, observes the author of *Ruins and Visions*. Sometimes it's a complex, sometimes a neurosis. The

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<sup>1</sup> Spender's lectures, sponsored by the British Council, were part of an intercultural program the British government ran to promote and disseminate English poetry around the world. The reception of Spender in the Brazilian intellectual environment was preceded by the reception of John Lehmann (poet, novelist, literary critic and editor), a friend of his.

preoccupation with “being modern” is often unconscious and in any case dominates the creative activity of a certain type of artist.

But “modern” [also] exists outside of us, as a consequence of this state of mind and as a phenomenon independent of it. So, strictly speaking, it's not a contemporary phenomenon. “What is contemporary is the insistence on modernism as an artistic aim.” For example, one of the outward signs of modernity in poetry, free verse, is already to be found in Marlowe and Shakespeare, as it is throughout traditional Spanish lyric (P. Henríquez Ureña, *La Versificación irregular en la poesía castellana*). But the insistence on the process, and its sort of convulsive systematization, is a phenomenon of contemporary modernism, which applies itself to taking a particular case of versification and deepening it to its extreme limits, surely one of the artistic resources that can best express what is irregular, extravagant, and troubled in our so-called modern soul.

A distinction must be made, however, between modern form and spirit. For Spender, Whitman's free verse is modern, but his poetry is not. His American free verse was the American War of Independence formally projected into literature: since the sensibility of the singer of *Leaves of Grass* is not essentially modern, the poems do not fit in with it, often resulting in boring, superficial, external enumerations. Whitman, in his “revolutionary” poetry, ends up reminding us of Tennyson. Whereas Baudelaire, faithful to tradition and even formal convention, reveals himself to be disturbingly modern, and the father of modern poetry: his content is modern life itself: “the experience of boredom, humanity, the ugliness, and beauty of the modern city”.

Modern, then, is what characterizes life today, in how it differs from life at any other time or at any other point. It is, in a word, industrialization, with its psychological, human and social consequences. One of them pointed out by Eliot: our rhythmic sensibility is no longer the same as that of our ancestors because it has been modified by the noise of the gasoline engine.

Beware, though: the modern poet is not simply the one who sings of the machine or the tentacular city, and it may well be that he is not. Rather, he is the one who strives “consciously to place the interior world of the creative imagination in a certain relationship with the contemporary environment. And this aim can only result from the feeling that there is an existing relationship which is unsatisfactory.” He considers the definition to be model, and applicable to any type of modern artist, both today and in the more distant past. The new is therefore nothing more than a new relationship established between things and us.

Continuing his exposition, Spender notes that modern poetry seems to have a general function: to integrate into the poetic world the ugliness, the fantastic beauty, the apparent inhumanity of the phenomena of the so-called “the machine age.” Its moving task is therefore not to make poetry inhuman or inhumane, but to reject the idea that the world we live in is inhuman, made of steel, steam, and cosmic energies. The machine becomes a poetic symbol of human passions; the dream of the machine is poeticized, since everything is a dream, and a great city is nothing more than a huge collection of mixed and overlapping dreams. The Napoleonic dreams of glory left their physical mark on Paris, the Arc de Triomphe, and, “under the great jackboots of the German dream during the Occupation burns the little votive flame of the Unknown Soldier” —another lasting dream, another lasting symbol. “In some quarters of the city, the lives of the poor—that is to say the dreams and aspirations of the poor—are entangled in the more rigid and powerful lines of the dreams of their exploiters. But nevertheless it is all a dream, and the only hope of humankind is to make it dream a better dream, seek a better and less selfish kind of happiness, and banish nightmares.” In Spender's poetic light, Marxism itself is nothing more than a theory of dream interpretation, applied on a vast scale to the whole of society, and not in the tiny proportion of the human individual.

Less artificial than it might seem at first glance, our essayist's conception is based on the fact that we live on two levels: the interior, which is fluid and shifting according to our individual fantasy, and the exterior, where the product of that fantasy is deposited and crystallizes. Thus, machines, wars, and imperialism are just the crystallization, in time and space, of our dreams, or, worse, our nightmares. Apparently monstrous, these solidified nightmares are still human, very human; we just prefer to consider them outside of humanity, when we no longer have the strength to escape them.

This is the drama of the machine age, the modern drama par excellence, of which today's poet has a tragic perception.

Here the "social realist" intervenes and proposes that the poet transform this nightmare. But the seasoned Spender of 1948 does not assign such a function to the poet: by taking care of the transformation of the dream, he would stop dreaming, adhering to crystallization, and would become a mere propagandist; he would leave the inner level to mechanize himself "in constructive and external tasks."

It's true that the modern artist has lent himself to this experience. It is also true that contradictory impulses often shake him. Thus the case of W. H. Auden, cited by Spender, and his own, like that of other great poets of his generation, who moved from the social to the subjective, from the political to the metaphysical—"periods of expansion followed by periods of shrinking." Spender justifies Auden's retraction in his social vision by the obvious and unpleasant circumstance that "society does not seem to be moving towards a socialist Paradise." "If we are to form a poetically true picture of human life as a unity of consciousness underlying the diverse and broken up structure of external crystallizations of our time, a utopian vision is not enough." Poets of this type therefore sang the inverse of the reality that surrounded them, and their modernism was the negation of modern life, without at the same time being the overcoming or solution of it, which remains with its all too real nightmares. Another solution, Eliot's, converts the typically modern despair of "The Waste Land" into personal salvation through Christianity: the escape from time through timelessness. These "modern" experiences are liquidated as such. For Spender, there remains the modernist example of Apollinaire, who sought to extract from machinery and the new city the full range of aesthetic and human sensations that they could provide: his poems in turn give the sensation of a journey—"nevertheless it is a sad journey with very few resting places."

From all this, Spender concludes that modernism has died out, for lack of a purpose: it is no longer contemporary. The modern artist was a sword swallower, sometimes with great potential, because he had to devour even turbines and machine guns. His weapons of action and reaction were sensitivity and personality. These are not enough in today's world.

At the end of this imperfect summary, we would have to discuss with our poet the expiration, which he proclaims, of a state of mind that cannot have been exhausted, just as the reality it nourishes or reflects has not been exhausted. Let's admit that a group of poets have individually reached the truths that in some way end the somewhat romantic cycle of modernism conceptualized from the angle we have just explained. It is no less true, however, that the process of disintegrating nightmares is only just beginning, and poetry, like the arts in general, and like man himself, has to find a way out to clarity. The particular truths that a poet reaches do not necessarily spread to others, who will have to discover them for themselves. In general, the "modern" territory has yet to be explored, with all its dark enigmas. What has not yet begun to be born is not dead (ANDRADE, 1949).

### **Rhetorical Motifs of Drummond's Essay**

As we have seen, Spender was a well-known poet and essayist in Brazil. This explains why Drummond published a critical review of "What Is Modern in Modern Poetry." The Drummond's purpose was agonistic. His intention was to criticize his detractors, the young poets of the Clube de Poesia in São Paulo and the *Revista Orfeu* in Rio de Janeiro. These young poets were adherents of the pure poetry of Paul Valéry, Paul Claudel, and Henri Bremond, so they were artists who refused to portray urban, machinelike, industrial, ugly, and inhuman realities, even though they lived in that reality. They preferred the aesthetic comfort of poetry from the top of the Ivory Towers. Furthermore, these young poets, admirers of Spender's poetry, used to accuse Drummond of plagiarizing them. Being defenders of pure poetry, the *novíssimos* always praised their own youthfulness, contrasting it with Drummond's supposed senility. Young poets often harassed Drummond by calling him "doddering old fool."

I could see that in "Poetry and Nightmare" Drummond subtly used the authority of Spender's theses to make visible the poetic contradictions of Spender's epigones in Brazil; he used the master's

arguments to expose the self-deception of his followers. Drummond implied that the *novísimos* poets were, according to Spender's criteria, only "apparently modern."

Another rhetorical motif implicit in the essay is that Drummond found in the machine-humanist turn of the poetry of the thirties in the post-war period an aesthetic justification for the turn in his own poetry. On the pretext of reviewing the English critic's theses, Drummond used them as an Archimedean point for re-founding his own poetic convictions. He took as an example the self-critical efforts of the thirties, especially Spender and Auden. It is in this sense that the criticism in "Poetry and Nightmare" is also self-criticism. Thus, the "imperfect summary" of Spender's theses had an external direction, against the "novísimos," and an internal, self-critical direction. We will now see how Drummond creatively assimilated Spender's poetics of tension to create his most enigmatic poem.

### Drummond and Spender's Lessons

What lessons did the author of "The Machine of the World" learn from Stephen Spender's essay? After reading "What is Modern in Modern Poetry" and comparing Spender's arguments with those set out by Drummond in "Poetry and Nightmare," I noticed how the Brazilian poet, in writing his most ambitious poem, made creative use of various aesthetic precepts espoused by the English poet. By comparing the two essays with the machine poem, I came to the conclusion that there were six lessons from Spender that Drummond put into practice when writing the poem.

The first lesson teaches that the modern poet must consciously maintain the tension he feels between the machine landscape and the landscape of the "inner world of the creative imagination." Therefore, in "The Machine of the World," I clearly see the tension between the "desire to affirm" and the "desire to suggest" (BROTHERTON, 1991, p.190). One sees this tension in some of Spender's poems, such as "Landscape Near an Aerodrome" and "The Express." Under the influence of such examples, Drummond's poem is permeated by various tensions of this nature, such as the tension between reality and imagination, revelation and enigma, nature and the machine, science and mystical faith, action and contemplation, the natural order of being and the artificial order of man, the desire to accept the "gift" (*a coisa oferta*) and the reluctant desire to refuse it, the rural landscape of Itabira and the modern machine-industrial landscape, the miraculous epiphany and the routine of an evening. These tensions are typical of a poet who thought intensely about his poems before writing them. The practical result of this poetics of tension is the formulation of enigmas. Drummond came to understand himself as an artist who had to pose riddles to his readers without committing himself to solving them. This poetics of tension allowed the poet to create inconclusive enigmas that lie between suggestion and affirmation.

Spender's second lesson concerns the aesthetic duty of the modern artist to represent the machine-like, urban world around him in a beautiful and poetic way. It is the duty of modern poets to transfigure ugliness into poetic beauty. To do so, they must find the golden middle way between the dream of an idealized world and the nightmare of an ugly, machine-like and socially unjust reality. When Drummond says that the "general function" of "modern poetry" is "to integrate into the poetic world the ugliness, the fantastic beauty, the apparent inhumanity of the phenomena of the so-called 'age of machinism,'" he seems to be in search of this golden mean. The epiphanic vision of the lyrical speaker in "The Machine of the World" translates well this integration between the imagination and the realistic representation of the machine-like world human ingenuity built. For this reason, the poem's narrative develops between descriptive realism and fantastic imagination, without us knowing whether it is an experiment in poetic fantasy or a metonymy of the modern machine world.

Hence Spender's third lesson: poets must be alert both to the misconceptions of excessive utopian visionaryism and to the limits of creeping realism. The difficult task of poetically transfiguring the ugliness of the modern world into beauty often brings poets face to face with the temptation to deny reality. This denial can take the form of five types of "flights": (i) the bucolic-pantheistic flight (as seen in the poetry of D. H. Lawrence); (ii) the idealistic and visionary flight (as seen in the art of utopian and revolutionary poets who project the dream of a "socialist Paradise"

onto reality); (iii) the flight to mystical-Christian poetry (as seen in the poetics of the late T. S. Eliot); (iv) the flight into the unconscious (as seen in the automatic writing of surrealist poetry and its phantasmagorical images), and, finally; (v) the sensorialist flight (as seen in the poetry of Apollinaire “who sees in all human inventions the potential to experience new sensations, to create new worlds, new forces”). According to Spender, none of these escapes are acceptable for a modern poet, because they are strategies of subterfuge. Reading the poems in *Claro Enigma* (1951), we realize that these flights did not seduce Drummond.

This leads to Spender’s fourth lesson, whose precept is a warning to poets about the mimetic limits of utopian poetry. No poet, says the essayist, has the power to transform the nightmare of machine reality into a utopian-socialist or pacifist dream. Poets who impose this transformative mission on themselves tend to become “mere propagandists” whose commitment is “mechanized” into “constructive and external tasks.” Reading Spender’s essay, Drummond realized that the more the utopian poet idealized the dream of a socialist society, the more his poetry would become distant from the immediate reality it was supposed to portray. Utopian poets, like Drummond himself, could only portray the ghosts created by their own imagination. Utopian poetry would therefore be a false poetic solution that would induce poets to “distance themselves from the machine-like and horrific reality” of the modern age. Spender uses Auden’s poetry as an example, saying that the author of *Spain* “retracted” or “shrank” in his “social vision” because of the perception of such mimetic “distancing.” For Drummond, the examples of Auden and Spender could not be disregarded or ignored. Thus, the Brazilian poet began to rethink the program of social poetry that he had espoused until then (BORTOLOTTI, 2020). In what terms did this rethinking take place?

After reading “What is Modern in Modern Poetry” Drummond took three self-critical stances with regard to the limits of utopian poetry: (i) initially, as we can see in “Poetry and Nightmare,” the Brazilian poet set out to evaluate the social poetry of his own books, such as *Sentimento do Mundo* (1940), *José* (1942), and *A Rosa do Povo* (1945). This immediate critical self-assessment made Drummond defensively strive to preserve the legacy of his engaged poetry. He then began to question himself about “the particular truths” reached by such socialist poetics. This self-questioning was an attempt to give legitimacy and authenticity to these truths, even if they were “somehow enclosed in the romantic cycle of modernism conceptualized from the angle” Spender proposed. In short, Drummond realized the romantic and idealistic element of the social poetry he had been practicing uncritically until then.

(ii) Drummond came to see Spender’s criticism of utopian poetry as a suggestion for him to rework his own poetry. This second self-critical stance led the Brazilian poet to see utopian poets as quixotic literati whose “utopian vision is not enough to [...] make a poetically true portrait of human life, as a unity of consciousness under the shattered structure of the external crystallizations of our time” (ANDRADE, 1949). For Drummond, a reader of Spender, every engaged poet involuntarily “adheres to crystallization,” driven by the goodwill of wanting to “take care of the transformation of the dream.” In short, Drummond realized that the poet who aspires to transform the world aspires to change the convictions of all people, because he sees himself as someone “greater than the world,” a superior third party who lives in the illusion of a misfit man (*gauche*) in the face of the common reality of “ordinary” men. Every revolutionary poet sacralizes his own estrangement from the world and begins to have an enlightened self-image of himself. He wants to transform reality according to his convictions and therefore lives in function of that reality, making himself a slave to it; and because he lives in function of the unjust reality, he will never be able to transform it. He neither is unable to create his own poetic reality from the reality he is given, nor is he able to adjust his own perceptions to those of the ordinary people around him. Therefore, he lives cut off from common reality. He “stops dreaming” and lowers himself to the status of “propagandist.”

(iii) Finally, Drummond opposed the way in which Spender radically rejected the utopian dream as part of modern poetic creation. Although the Brazilian poet agrees with Spender about the poetic disillusionment of utopian visionaryism, he believes the modern poetic creation should integrate such an aesthetic, since “the reality from which it is nourished or which it reflects has not been exhausted,” given that “the state of mind” of the modern poet has not been exhausted. Drummond

opposed Spender by pointing out that the poet's utopian work "is only just beginning" because "the process of disintegrating nightmares" has only just begun in our time.

It is remarkable how Spender, in a book subsequent to this 1948 essay, converges with Drummond with regard to the need to keep the dream as part of poetry. In *The Creative Element* (1953), Spender says that the representation of modern urban reality cannot deny the existence and necessity of dreams, because the man of the machine age is still capable of dreaming. Even if the poet understands that the impetus of dreaming exposes him to the risk of living an illusion detached from reality, he must know how to balance fantasy and reality in his poetic creation:

Real, reality, Realism: these words have to be used with the utmost caution. But we can't at all avoid using them, because it is surely true that the values of the visionary writing of the last hundred years will ultimately be judged by the extent to which it is real: that is, to which it contains the felt experience of modern life. (SPENDER, 1953, p.22).

In this passage, Spender admits that utopian and visionary poetry will be judged in the future on its ability to "contain the felt experience of modern life." In short, the English poet came to recognize that the mimetic detachment from machinic reality could be remedied or overcome by engaged poets without them completely abolishing their visionary dreams. Drummond would certainly agree.

The fifth lesson assimilated by Drummond concerns the use of fixed forms in modern poetry. Spender convinced Drummond that a return to traditional forms was a necessary path for post-war poets, even if this return had to take place according to the mimetic imperatives of realist and machine poetry. Drummond learned from Spender that the rhythmic and thematic sensibility of modern poets could be expressed both in free verse and in traditional poetic forms, without damaging the poems' mimetic power. The assimilation of this lesson explains, to a large extent, the repeated use of sonnets in *Claro Enigma* (1951), as well as the Dantesque tercets in "The Machine of the World", a poem in which machinic reality is poetically portrayed using one of the most traditional fixed forms of Western poetry.

In a letter from Otto Maria Carpeaux to Drummond, dated November 8, 1944, the Austrian polymath refers to the recent sonnets by Auden, Spender, and George Barker, which applied the "traditional metric without becoming pernostic." He then says he remembers "those 'few long poems,'" "narrative poems," which he liked, pointing out that they were "all English." These narrative poems would have in common a "kind of 'plot,' of intellectually conceivable content" (CARPEAUX apud ALVES & CAMILO, 2020, p.159). This confession of taste on Carpeaux's part seems like a reading recommendation, perhaps a suggestion of poetic exercise to its recipient. It's likely that Carpeaux's comparisons of the similarities between the engaged poetry of the thirties and Drummond's social poetry, from *Sentimento do Mundo* (1940) onwards, influenced the bard from Minas Gerais to read and study the work of those poets in depth, especially Spender and Auden. When we read a poem like "The Machine of the World" there is no doubt that Drummond assimilated these recommendations, even if he did so disobeying his Austrian preceptor, who said in the same missive that "in Portuguese, a return to the traditional metric would be a disgrace, it is impossible." *Claro Enigma* (1951) was conceived precisely on the basis of such a "return to traditional metrics," as Drummond's other preceptor in this self-critical crisis called for—Stephen Spender.

Finally, Spender's sixth and most important lesson: the realization that "the machine is a poetic symbol of human passions," and that it is up to the poet to "poeticize the dream of the machine, since everything is a dream." If you look closely, you'll see that all the mechanical visions described in "The Machine of the World" (between tercets 17 and 22) are the work of human ingenuity: bridges, buildings, workshops, myths, gods, the dominion of passions, the geometric order of nature, mining ("all resources and means of earth steep," "to soak in the angry sleep of minerals deep"). Let's take a look at these tercets in Bruno Tolentino's translation:

The bridges most superb, the buildings past  
all conceivable craft, all though of first  
  
or last causes gone beyond all pitch,  
all resources and means of earth steep

—all passions, all impulses, all of pain  
 and whatever defines us human beings  
 then proceeds through animals and plants  
 to soak in the angry sleep of minerals deep;

what will turn round the world until again  
 is engulfed in the wholesome, all too plain  
 geometrical order of all things,

and the absurd original, its enigmas  
 more truthful and higher still than all the grandest  
 monuments ever built to truth on earth;

and the memory of the gods, and that solemn  
 sentiment of death which mars all birth  
 as we see it flowering through the stem

of even the most glorious thing alive  
 —everything in a glimpse was there to drive  
 my senses back to a realm august

finally given to the human gaze...

The tercets above seem to embody poetically the two ideas put forward by Spender and Drummond in their respective essays. The first idea states that machines synthesize—philosophically and materially—the reality of the modern industrial world; the second states that machines are not just external objects, but form the very self-image of modern man. With these two philosophical theses in mind, Drummond wrote a poem in which man is portrayed as the master of instrumental reason that dominates Earth's resources and human passions. The machine is the solidification of this practical, technical, scientific and philosophical knowledge that subjugates all of nature, organic and inorganic, as well as human nature itself. Therefore, the machine is a self-image of modern man, the machine-man who, since Descartes, has understood himself as an automaton, a hybrid of a trainable animal and a programmable machine.

### **The Machine: Human Self-Image and Metonym for the Modern World**

Another observation I came to after reading the two essays is that Drummond, after assimilating Spender's theses and arguments, changed his aesthetic and philosophical understanding of modern art in general and modern poetry in particular. Following Spender's argument, Drummond admits that the triumph of the utopian imagination over the duty to represent of machine reality has only produced a false poetry that shows us "the inverse of reality." But what is reality in the modern world? For Spender, as for Drummond, the reality of the contemporary is the machine-like, war-like, industrial, ugly, inhuman, impersonal and urban order of modern life. The mechanical "spirit" of this world "is industrialization and its psychological, human, and social consequences." However, "machines," like imperialist wars, are only "crystallized" projections of human ambitions and dreams. Despite its monstrous appearance, the machine "solidifies" individual and collective dreams, nightmares and fantasies. Its monstrosity is "very human," even if we recognize it outside the traditional conception of human nature, that is, the unconfessed conception of man as the image and likeness of God (PLESSNER, 2009).

As Drummond's critical fortune knows, the representation of modernity as the "age of machines" was already in Drummond's debut, *Alguma Poesia* (1930), but only in an incidental and superficial way. There was a separation between machine and man. The poet positioned himself as a passive observer of modern reality. Thus, the first Drummond restricted himself to giving the machines of urban life—the automobile, the horn, the elevator, the switch, electricity, the fast streetcar—a merely descriptive poetic treatment, based on "boring, superficial, and external enumerations" (ANDRADE, 1949). In "The Machine of the World" (1949), however, Drummond

sees the machine as the human self-image and as a metonymy of the modern world. For Drummond, machines are not anecdotal objects, ironically described as routine or inhuman (GLEDSON, 1981, p. 68-70), but a mirror image of modern man and his dreams of instrumental domination of nature; and because they are crystallized projections of human will, they materialize “the drama of the age of machines.”

It is true that even the young poet of 1930 never conceived of his poetry as subordinate to the aesthetic program of the modernist art of 1922 (GLEDSON, 1981, p.84). Even so, the author of *Alguma Poesia* assimilated from the aesthetic programme of 1922 colloquial and Brazilianized verse (imitating the speech of ordinary Brazilians), free verse (succinct and direct), a sense of humour, irony, anecdotal spontaneity, an appreciation of joy and bodily sensations. After all, for the modernists of the first generation in Brazil, the use of these poetic devices would be the most efficient way of asserting Brazilianness against Lusitanism, popular and carnival culture against European formalism. To these fundamental elements was added the imperative of the poetic representation of the urban experience. Thus, the modernism of the first Drummond poetically expressed the spirit of urban routine as a negation of the past and a preview of the future.

It's clear that the Drummond of the late 1940s and early 1950s had largely overcome these aesthetic imperatives (with the exception, of course, of irony as a poetic resource). In an interview with *Correio Paulistano* on February 7, 1952, on the occasion of the thirtieth anniversary of the Modern Art Week, Drummond answered some questions about what modernism was to him at the time. It is clear that the definition espoused by the poet in those days converged with Spender's diagnosis of the exhaustion of modernist aesthetics, albeit for different reasons. When asked what modernism was, Drummond replied:

In practice, we identify modernism as opposed to the outdated, the academic. It is characterized by a spirit of search, investigation, contrast and revision of values. It is essentially dialectical, seeking out contradictions and resolving them through new contradictions and syntheses. It is a spirit of negation and affirmation at the same time. It can be found by opposing what it denies. This is modernism in general. [...] In Brazil, it was a movement of literary and artistic renewal that was born out of the struggle against the academicism that still existed in 1922, and which, as it evolved, gave rise to contradictory philosophical and political definitions such as fascism and communism. We mustn't forget the Catholic spiritualism that represented one of the segments of this group and, in another sense, sociological research [Drummond refers to Gilberto Freyre, another icon of national modernism, according to him]. [...] As an active movement [modernism] is over. But the climate of literature and art in Brazil, whether the people who make literature and art like it or not, is still that created by modernism. [...] Despite some foreign affiliations, modernism was an attempt to adapt Brazilian intelligence to the Brazilian environment. No one could honestly say that the poems of Manuel Bandeira, Jorge de Lima or Mário de Andrade represent decals of foreign models. Contrary to what is happening today [with the poets of the Generation of '45], when it is the law to slavishly copy T. S. Eliot, Rilke, and even Neruda. As for Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa, he's no longer copied—he's stolen. On the other hand, what makes me suspect the death of modernism is that official bodies and the Brazilian Academy of Letters have taken it upon themselves to celebrate it, even though it is the least official movement in the world. I was astonished to see that the Academy unanimously approved Cassiano Ricardo's proposal to promote this commemoration. The most reasonable thing would be for the modernists who are there to encounter vehement opposition and, as a sign of protest, leave the Academy (ANDRADE, 1952).

The interview makes it clear that Drummond, three years after reading Spender's essay, adhered to some of the English poet's theses with which he disagreed. The first concerns the exhaustion of modernism as an aesthetic program. Modernism, says Drummond in 1952, “as an active movement is over.” This statement denies what Drummond himself had said in “Poetry and Nightmare” when he pointed out that “the ‘modern’ territory is still to be explored, with all its dark enigmas” and that, therefore, “what has not yet begun to be born is not dead.” This change in judgment about the vitality of the movement to which the Brazilian poet had belonged indicates a belated acquiescence to the theses of his English interlocutor. Spender's second thesis, with which Drummond came to agree,

concerned what the English poet called the “modern attitude,” which should give beauty to what is ugly and recognize humanity in what is monstrous and inhuman. Therefore, to redefine his idea of modern art, the Drummond of 1952 used terms such as “spirit of search, of contrast, of revision of values,” “spirit of negation and affirmation, simultaneously,” movement “essentially dialectical, looking for contradictions” and “resolving them by new contradictions and syntheses.”

### Conclusions

As we have seen, “Poetry and Nightmare” is a workshop essay that captures the moment when Drummond was trying to build a new poetic path for his poetry in the light of Spender’s reflections. This new path was not given to him for free as an automatic consequence of his political disillusionment with the Brazilian Communist Party and the cause of revolutionary poetry. The poet had to patiently build his new poetics on the basis of new readings and reflections, including Stephen Spender’s essay.

Drummond certainly thought of the machine of the world as a metonymy of the modern machine world and as a self-image of contemporary man. This philosophical vision was conceived and built on the reflections of Spender’s essay and the poem “As I Walked out One Evening,” by W. H. Auden, with which the Brazilian poet dialogued intertextually. Drummond certainly gestated the idea of the poem for a few months until he came across the mystical epiphany of Jorge de Lima’s *Livro de Sonetos* (1949), a work which its tour de force proposed, among other things, the stylistic reinvention of the Camonian verse tradition in modern Portuguese-Brazilian poetry. To some extent, Jorge de Lima’s example inspired Drummond, albeit in strictly stylistic terms, since he refused to adhere to the mystical solution of the poet of *Invenção de Orfeu* (1953). He preferred the outlet provided by the philosophical and machinelike poetry of books like Spender’s *Ruins and Visions* (1942) and Auden’s *Another Time* (1940). With these examples in mind, Drummond set about redesigning the setting, the walk and the hypothetical time of the poem “As I Walked out One Evening,” even though the machine chosen as the protagonist of the poem’s narrative was not a public clock, but the Camonian machine of the world. Drummond was thus able to give a ciphered poetic answer to the mystical visions of his mimetic rival, Jorge de Lima—an answer that found its philosophical substratum in Spender’s and Camus’ reflections (ALMEIDA, 2022).

The machine laid out all its material and symbolic feats before the indifferent eyes of the walker, but the poet refused them, because he didn’t want to exert dominion over either the truths of machine philosophy (and its instruments) or the mystical truths (and their transcendent visions like an absurdist, the poem’s narrator saw these conflicting truths and suspended his judgment about them, suggesting to the reader a gesture of ataraxia and giving up. The “truth” of the “original absurdity and its enigmas” is also offered to the walker, among other sequenced truths. And although this philosophy of the absurd is described as having “higher truths than so many / monuments erected to truth,” it is also rejected, because Drummond uses it only as an actor who allows himself to be incarnated by “another being” who, hypothetically, starts to “command” his “will.” Indifferent to absurdist truths, the poet does not shy away from using metaphors, visions and concepts from Camusian philosophy (ALMEIDA, 2022). By refusing everything that has been offered to him, the poem’s lyricist is left with no choice but to “go slowly, with his hands thinking.” The machine of the world is conceived, in the end, as a metonymy of modern instrumental reason, not as a metal contraption. In this way, the lyricist recognizes the spirituality of matter in the materiality of philosophy.

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