

From Parnassus to slams: anthologies as a meeting space with poetry

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When we look at our literary historiography, over the last two centuries, among many other issues, poem anthologies tradition stands out. The first one was *Brazilian Parnassus, or a selection of poems by the best Brazilian poets since the discovery of Brazil*, organized by J. M. P. da Silva, published in 1848, which, in turn, takes up the *Brazilian Parnassus, or a collection of the best poetry by Brazilian poets, both unpublished and published*, from 1829-1832, organized by canon Januário da Cunha Barbosa. Still in the 19th century, the most comprehensive anthology was *Brazilian Poetry Florilegium*, organized by Francisco Adolfo Varnhagen in three volumes.¹ In the 20th century, especially since modernism, there were a diversity of poem anthologies that have yet to be studied – due to the criteria used for choosing authors and poems, among other issues. More specifically on modern poetry, there are countless works organized with the most diverse criteria, all focused on the dissemination of our poetic richness. Attention is drawn to the poet Manuel Bandeira's important work, who organized several anthologies of Brazilian poetry, already adopting a periodic division of styles, a classification that does not appear in 19th century works. A significant example of this poet's work is *Anthology of Brazilian poets from the Romantic phase*, whose first edition dates back to 1936. In the wake of Bandeira's work, other ones emerged, such as the complete collection of Brazilian poetry from first manifestations to modern poetry, by Péricles Eugênio da Silva Ramos, the *Modern Anthology of Brazilian Poetry*, by Fernando Ferreira de Loanda, and *Modern Poetry*, by Mário da Silva Brito, to name just a few with a widest circulation.

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¹ For a more precise view of anthologies from the 19th to the 20th centuries, as well as historiographical works of Brazilian literature, see Cairo's essay (1995).

In the second half of the 20th century, more specifically in the final two decades and beginning of the 21st century, thematic anthologies began to emerge, such as those which bring together erotic and pornographic poems (MORAES, 2015; BUENO, 2004), and Afro-Brazilian poems (BERND, 2011). Also by that time, female writers' anthologies began to appear, such as *Word of a Woman*, organized by Maria de Lourdes Horta (1979), a trend that has been gaining a broader dimension in recent years. One that has a broader historical background in this context is *Women poets of Brazilian literature*, organized by Rubem Jardim (2021). During this period, there are also anthologies organized according to state by the critic and researcher Assis Brasil, giving visibility to poets without national resonance. Most states were contemplated in this project, whose titles follow a pattern: *Poetry from Ceará*, *Poetry from Piauí*, *Poetry from Minas Gerais* and *Poetry from Maranhão in the 20th century*, among many others.

In the academic field, little to none is known of anthologies collecting poetry from our rich oral and popular tradition, with emphasis on what came to be called, from the 1960s onwards, *cordel* literature (or string literature). Here stands out the pioneering work *Northern Viola Players*, by the Ceará researcher Leonardo Mota, whose first edition dates back to 1925. However, the most promoted work was *Popular Anthology in Verses*, organized by Manoel Cavalcanti de Proença, which collects strings booklets dated from the beginning of the 20th century until the 1960s.

Another thread of anthologies started in the 19th century and that gained momentum on the second half of the 20th century onwards was the children's poems ones. We recall here anthologies such as *The book of birds*, organized by Presciliana Duarte and, later, the Henriqueta Lisboa's work *Poems for childhood and Poems for youth*. Mário da Silva Brito and Cassiano Nunes (1968) bequeathed us the *Brazilian poetry for childhood*, which had only one edition. At the same time, we draw attention to *Poems I chose for children*, work organized by Ruth Rocha (2013), and to the *Illustrated anthology of Brazilian poetry for children of any age*, organized by Adriana Calcanhoto (2014).

Thinking about the presence of anthologies in schools has always accompanied me throughout my professional life, both as a developing student-reader and as a basic and higher education teacher. I want to see anthologies as an instrument of great importance for bringing children and

young people closer to poetry. If, as a child, I did not have access to books, as a teenager I came across some anthologies, which were definitive for my formation. They brought me a rich diversity of authors unbeknown to me and many poems that I did not always understand. However, some of them did absorb me, often leading me to memorize them, without really knowing why I had been lured by them.

Two anthologies were decisive for my development: *Poems for youth*, by Henriqueta Lisboa, and, later, *Modern Poetry*, by Péricles Eugênio da Silva Brito. The first, organized with a more didactic perspective, but without making concessions regarding the poems aesthetic value, helped me to discover Cecília Meireles in a eighth or seventh grade textbook. It was there that I came across “Afternoon song in the field”, a poem which makes me company until today. I also found out then the great variety of writers who had also written poems.

The second anthology came to me via a theater director who lent us his book – and I have it with me until today – so that we could read and stage “In the midway”, in five minutes... It was then that I began to approach a certain gentleman named Carlos Drummond de Andrade, and, also, it was then that I discovered a poet talking about São João nights, which I liked so much: Manuel Bandeira. It was that anthology, not school, that brought me these writers. I read alone, not understanding much, but feeling that a universe was there attracting me like a magnet. Wherever I went – São Paulo, Minas, São Paulo again, Fortaleza, Paraíba – they accompanied me. I even lost one of them and later got a similar copy in a second-hand bookstore.

Certainly, each reader will have a different experience with books in general and with poetry anthologies. My experience, however, makes me think about the kind of contribution that this type of work can give to readers developing. First, it brings a vast range of authors and texts that can stand out for different readers at certain times in their lives, as happened to me. I think, based on my professional experience, that we could indicate anthologies to be read throughout high school, not as a “para-didactic” subject of a test, but as a small verse library to be visited and revisited at any time. That is it: an anthology – or several divided by authors, themes,

forms etc. – that readers could get whenever they want and the way they want in order to share with colleagues their tastes, discoveries, doubts, and misunderstandings.

When I organized a child and youth poetry anthology for 6th grade students of a public school in São Paulo, in the mid-1980s, a curious fact happened: many students finished doing math, geography or history assignments and asked their teachers if they could read the “anthology” by themselves. A math teacher came to me and asked what this anthology was about. I showed her a stencil copy and she asked me to give her one to take to her children. After that, of course she let the students to read poetry in her math class.

I have never forgot this experience and I have never applied a test using those poems. Once a week, we went to the schoolyard to read poetry (we also read narratives). Everyone chose the poem they wanted. Afterwards, they were asked to read the chosen poem aloud. And when a student chose poems that other students had chosen, there was no problem, it was read again. The idea was to create a time of coexistence with poems always respecting each one’s taste – or distaste, as many said that they didn’t like poetry, nonetheless being always capable of highlighting one they liked).

I think anthologies could be more frequently explored in every elementary school and at the University as well as a means of being read and reread over the years. As an example, two anthologies organized by Vera Teixeira Aguiar, Simone Assumpção and Sissa Jacob (1997), *Poetry off the shelf*, can accompany readers from 5th to 7th grade (not only, but above all). The books, if adopted or bought by governments, could, at least twice a month, have poems read, commented on, talked about, staged – if some students wanted –, illustrated or simply could be read and reread.

I worked for a few years with the collection *To enjoy reading* anthology, volume 6, with the 5th and 6th grades (which today mean the 6th and 7th grades). Subsequently, other editions of the poetry-focused collection were issued.

This dossier of *Cadernos CESPUC de Pesquisa: Série Ensaios* brings us the broad spectrum of contemporary poem anthologies and some older ones. Some text of the dossier reflect on what we will call *anthologies organized by a curator who selects poems by various authors*. That is, these

are works made up of poems from various eras and by various authors. This paradigm for organizing anthologies was considered with high school readers in mind.

We started the dossier with the text “A poetic anthology according to Maria Bethânia’s dialogical songs”, by Rafael Batista Andrade, who suggest organizing an anthology with poems read and recited by Maria Bethânia throughout her career as a singer. The plan is the result of a careful research about the interpreter’s career, and brings a diversity of poems, from different eras, contemplating Brazilian and Portuguese poets. For the author, with these poems in a single volume, the “public would also be encouraged to know or remember Bethânia’s work, especially her albums in which there are songs articulated with poems”. We would add: the developing reader could also have access, beside the texts, to Bethânia’s interpretative power and, certainly, could expand their reading repertoire, undergoing a unique aesthetic experience.

In “The tradition of anthologies: reflections on women’s writing, identity and poetry”, Bruna Gabriele Oliveira focuses on the anthology recently organized by Heloísa Buarque de Holanda, writer and an experienced anthologist. Called *The 29 poets of today*, the book has great significance, including poets from different parts of Brazil, an aspect that differentiates it from other anthologies focusing more on the Brazilian southeastern poetry. As the author points out, “this analysis focus is to discuss, based on her preface, the organizer methodological, discursive and political adopted path, in an attempt to highlight how new female voices are updated in the contemporary poetic field context [...]”.

The third article, “Poetic voices echoed by Black Brazilian women”, by Ângelo Cardoso Sá, focuses on *Black Brazilian poets*: an anthology, organized by Jarid Arraes (2021). The book features 74 poems by black women “of different ages living in different Brazilian states”. According to Sá, “the plurality expressed in each poetic-self allows us to state that, even implicitly identifying a constant of gender and skin color, the poems enunciate many ways of being a woman.”.

The fourth text “Emerging voices from the anthology *From the streets to the schools, from the schools to the streets*: interschool Slam, by Haissa Vitoriano and José Hélder Pinheiro Alves, focuses on what can be considered a phenomenon in contemporary poetry production context: poetry born

from SLAMS, marked by voices of young people coming frequently from marginalized areas. According to the authors, the aim of their text is “to understand and list possible selection criteria for the anthology poems, in addition to discussing the book informative and formative character for teachers and other professionals in poetry, who intend to work this genre with young people and teenagers [...]”. It should be noted the significance of this exchange between street and school that could encourage many young people to become intimate to poetry.

Thaís Fernanda Viana Batista’s article, “Thinking about poetry: an analysis of the visions of poetry in the anthology *Poesia faz pensar*”, focuses on one anthology part the *To enjoy reading* collection. According to her, “we sought to analyze the anthology composition, bearing in mind, mainly, the selected names that compose the book [...]”. In addition, “anthology is an important tool for working with poem reading in classroom, as it brings a poetry conception as result of an aesthetic elaboration and the poet’s reflection on the ways of writing poems [...]”. This view on anthologies deviates a little from the ones often associating poetry merely with romantic conceptions and with construing poems according to inspiration.

The next article deals with a 19th century work: “*Brazilian Florilegium of childhood*: a brief look at the anthology”, by Ana Paula Serafim Marques da Silva. It “focused on children and circulated in Brazilian primary schools at the end of the 19th century [...]”. According to da Silva, a book like this, with circulation restricted to the 19th century, “configures a true literary archive, since it presents the children’s poetry source in Brazil [...]”. Definitely, the poems selection criteria reveals much of what was available at that time and its prevailing pedagogical conception.

The article “*Poetry at school*: how to read and choose poems from the Alaíde Lisboa’s perspective”, by Raquel Beatriz Junqueira Guimarães and Rafael Ubirajara de Lima Campos, analyzes the anthology organized by Alaíde Lisboa of a more restricted circulation in Minas Gerais state. It deals with “pedagogue’s conceptions about literature, reading, the literary reading teaching, childhood, and readers development.”. In addition, it brings a debate about “ideas present in the edition para-texts and comments on poems selected for compositing the anthology.”.

The article by Sandrelle Rodrigues de Azevedo, “*Di-versos and Caldeirão de poemas*: the anthologies Translated by Tatiana Belinky”,

highlights the translations role in the evolution of our children's literature and comments on translations from German, Russian and Hebrew carried out by the writer Tatiana Belinky. According to Azevedo, there are "five anthologies adding up to one hundred and twenty-six poems, a significant contribution within our poetry for children and young people universe."

The final two articles focus on single poets anthologies. We already have a strong tradition of these anthologies, especially with authors linked to our modernism. Poets such as Manuel Bandeira, Carlos Drummond de Andrade, João Cabral de Melo Neto, Cecília Meireles, among others, had their poems published in this anthology model.² From the middle of the 20th century onwards, perhaps the largest and most significant collection following this model was *The best poems* collection, by Editora Global, covering our literary historiography entire period, reaching the end of the 20th century. The anthologies presented here are very recent. One of them is *From love I have lived*, by Hilda Hilst – fictionist, playwright, and poet. One of the anthology particularities is the text-image dialogue, between Hilst's poems and Ana Prata's illustrations. This was rare among anthologies and could be considered an entry point for approaching developing readers. Thus, in her text, "Loving Hilda Hilst: the seductive contemporary illustrated anthology", Ana Luíza Franco analyzes "how the current dialogue between text and image contributes to seduce the contemporary reader, immersed as he is in an imagery society, in addition to discussing images as a result of intersemiotic translation, created by the illustrator from reading the poet's verses."

The final article "Poetry, dispersion and anthology in Millôr Fernandes", by Alessandra Mara Vieira, brings a broad view about Millôr Fernandes' poetic work. One of the author's intentions is "to compare some poetic texts originally published in *The Cruise* magazine, during the 40s and 60s, and the way they are presented in two books: *Papáverum Millôr* and *This face is not strange to me and other poems*, written decades later [...]". Still according to the author, "Millôr resisted dispersion when he organized books and published his literary and artistic texts in compilations, a tool of resistance to fragmentation."

2 I must mention here three poets who published anthologies in the 1960s, organized by themselves: Carlos Drummond de Andrade, Manuel Bandeira and Vinícius de Moraes. All of them continue to be published by different publishers.

This dossier on Brazilian poetry in anthologies has, therefore, as a fundamental value, discussing and promoting the anthologies role in readers development – whether in school environment or in other spaces in general. May it instigate other researchers as well as the dissemination of works being carried out but without yet the desirable visibility. Moreover and above all, may it contribute to the anthologies studied here become better known and discussed, promoting the discovery of authors and an ever more meaningful coexistence with poetry.

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