

# The Mexican Haiku

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excerpted from

*Modern Haiku* 35.1 & 36.1

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### The Mexican Haiku, Part One: Origins\*

Those of us who live north of the Rio Grande tend to forget that Mexico has a history of commerce, trade, and cultural exchange with the Far East that is older than that which occurred on our side of the border, beginning as it did in the late 1500s. The influence of Japanese literature came later to *norteamericanos*, during the late 1800s and early 1900s, in a roundabout way via English and French poets. While some Mexicans very likely read these English and French works too, a more direct route was charted by the efforts of Mexican poet José Juan Tablada. In 1900 he went to Japan, where he was introduced to haiku and tanka and began himself to write in these forms. Upon his return to Mexico in 1904 he published a second edition of his *Florilegio* ("Selected Poems"), which included some translations of tanka as well as a sequence of his own haiku. All observers agree that Tablada's adaptation of Japanese poetics had an enormous effect on the flow not only of Mexican, but also of Latin American, poetry of the twentieth century.

Once the haiku had been introduced into Mexico and shortly thereafter into the rest of Latin America, it was not seen as alien or exotic but merely as poetry that fit well with other short Hispanic forms:

A striking formal coincidence with the *haiku* comes from Spanish folk music and the traditional *seguidilla* verses. The last stanza or *estrambote* sums up this type of song with a strong image in a tercet of 5-7-5 syllables, the same form as the *haiku*. Also popular are the *saetas* and *casidas*, verse forms characterized by brevity and striking imagery which sing of divine and earthly love (LaMadrid, 5).

In fact, the *seguidilla* comes in three forms, two of which have a 5-7-5 basic structure: the four-line 7-5-7-5 *simples* and the seven-line 7-5-7-5-5-7-5 *con bordón* ("La Seguidilla," 2002). Here is a popular example of a *simple* by an anonymous author:

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\* This article is based on the first half of a presentation by the authors at Haiku North America, The Dalton School, New York City, June 28, 2003. Translations from Spanish are by Krumins and Swede unless otherwise stated.



*Un pajarito alegre  
picó tu boca  
creyendo que tus labios  
eran dos rosas*

A happy baby bird  
pecked your mouth  
believing that your lips  
were two roses

JOSÉ JUAN TABLADA (1871–1945)

José Juan Tablada is a major figure in Mexican literary and intellectual history as a poet, journalist, painter, and art critic. Tablada's interest in Japanese art and literature went far beyond that of contemporary American and English poets, as shown by his two journeys to Japan, the first in 1900, followed by a year-long stay in 1910. During both visits he immersed himself in haiku and tanka as well as Zen Buddhism, and he published his favorable impressions of Japanese culture in Mexican magazines. During the autumn of 1900 in Yokohama he wrote the first haiku sequence in the Spanish language. It was published in 1904 within the second edition of his selected poems under the subtitle "Musa japonesa" ("The Japanese Muse") (Hadman, 2001). Because Tablada was a proponent of Modernismo, the influential avant-garde Spanish American poetry movement (Tinajero, 2002), his haiku created ripples far beyond Mexico.

Octavio Paz, the 1990 Nobel laureate in literature, states that Tablada "introduced the haiku into the Spanish language" (Paz, 211). Because Tablada was already a central figure in Mexican poetry, his work encouraged other major poets to try their hand at haiku. As a result, Mexico has produced more haiku poets than any other Spanish-speaking country in Latin America (Tinajero, 2002).

This is only part of the story of Tablada's influence, however. He also can be credited with acquainting not just fellow poets, but the entire educated class with Japanese poetry. In Mexico, poets are central cultural figures, not peripheral as they are in the United States and Canada:

In Mexico, the poet is a recognized and respected part of the intellectual and cultural life of the country, and a source of national pride. Many have served, and are now serving, as ambassadors or cultural attachés abroad, in the belief that a country is best represented by its best minds—an idea unimaginable or simply laughable in the United States (Torre and Wiegers, 12).



By contrast, a few major writers in the United States dabbled with the haiku, and some, such as Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, and Richard Wright, actually produced collections of haiku, but their involvement spread only among circles of poets and rarely engaged the attention of the general literary world. The same can be said about Canada (Swede, 9). The result was that in Mexico's two northern neighbors the haiku grew to be seen as a minor poetical diversion in which few members of the general public took much interest.

Not all of Tablada's haiku are successful, but many still speak to us nearly a century later. A complicating factor is the translation process; some English renderings undermine the original Spanish in which "Tablada uses an extraordinary range of musical resources" (Fleitas, 14). Furthermore, as a tireless innovator, his haiku "often departed from the original metric forms, but remained true thematically and aesthetically to their Japanese models" (La Madrid, 6). In fact, Tablada called his verses by names other than haiku, such as *disociaciones líricas* ("lyric dissociations") and *poemas sintéticos* ("synthetic poems"), but the designations did not stick. His reasons for creating new categories for his poems were based on his belief that true haiku were possible to write only in Japanese.

Tablada's first collection of haiku, *Un día ...* ("A day ..."), was published in 1919 in Caracas, Venezuela. This makes *Un día ...* the first collection of haiku to be published by a North American. *Un día ...* is further remarkable for the fact that each of its thirty-seven haiku is illustrated by the author. In fact, "all 200 copies are original watercolors, not reproductions ... [which] comes to 7,400 original paintings!" (Hadman, 2001, 4). Tablada published one more, larger haiku collection, *El jarro de flores* ("The Jar of Flowers") in New York in 1921. Haiku from both collections were published in 1971 in Tablada's *Obras. I—Poética* and all were collected in the early 1990s in his *Obras completas* (Tinajero, 11).

Following are some of Tablada's haiku that would be at home in the best anthologies published today:

EL SAÚZ

Tierno saúz  
casi oro, casi ámbar,  
casi luz ...

Tender willow  
almost gold, almost amber  
almost light ...

(Un día ...; Tinajero, 5)

(trans. Beckett; Paz, 150)



"El saúz" transforms word for word into English, and this is why every translator deals with it the same way. Nevertheless, some of Tablada's musical effects become lost, for instance, the "consonance of *saúz* and *luz*, so that [in Spanish] the haiku has a perfect resolution" (Fleitas, 15). There is also the loss of the assonance of *tierno* and *oro*, and *casi* has a more fluid sound than "almost."

The following haiku is also frequently translated, but there is little agreement on how it should be presented in English:

*PECES VOLADORES*

*Al golpe del oro solar  
Estalla en astillas el vidrio del mar*

(El jarro de flores; *González de Mendoza*, 4)

Smitten by the solar sun  
the glass sea breaks to shivers.

(*trans. Beckett; Paz*, 153)

As in his translation of "El saúz," Beckett does not include the title, which in this case, "Flying Fish," is crucial because it operates as a first line. As they stand the two lines seem to be the work of an overheated novice poet (isn't the sun solar?). The following three versions are truer to the original, but vary substantially from one another:

FLYING FISH

The sea's glassy surface  
bombarded by golden sunbeams  
explodes into splinters!

(*Hadman*, 2001, 9)

Golden sun, one stroke  
the sea glass shatters into chips  
flying fish.

(*Tinajero*, 6)

Struck by the golden sun  
The glassy sea splinters:  
Flying fish

Apart from using different synonyms, each version places the phrases of the original in different sequences. Hadman's version is the lengthiest.



Tinajero's version links the fish with chips (a favorite English takeaway meal), an unfortunate connotation. The last of these would likely be considered closest to a standard haiku and is also truest to the original wording, but some would argue that the shift of "flying fish" from the first to the third line represents an unnecessary tampering with the sequence of images. Here is a word-for-word transliteration of the original; you be the judge:

*Peces / voladores / Al / golpe / del / oro / solar /*  
Fish / flying / To the / strike / of the / gold / sun /

*Estalla / en / astillas / el / vidrio / del / mar*  
Bursts / in / splinters / the / glass / of the / sea

Tablada liked to play with alliteration and assonance to the degree that "sometimes he gives the impression of being deeply interested, not only in the meaning of words, but also in phonemes" (Fleitas, 15). This often results in a haiku that is much more difficult to translate than "El saúz."

Here is another of Tablada's best:

*LAS ABEJAS*

*Sin cesar gotea  
miel del colmenar  
cada gota es una abeja*

honeycomb dripping  
each drop  
... a bee

(Un día ...; Tinajero, 4)

(Hadman, 2001, 5)

The impulse to metaphor and simile influenced many of Tablada's haiku, as in this poem, but without detracting from the experience of the moment. Hadman's translation of "Las abejas" ("The Bees") is masterful insofar he has distilled the English version to nine syllables. The same can be said of this twelve-syllable rendering of Tablada's "6:30 P.M." by LaMadrid and Mares:

*6:30 P.M.*

*Nocturnas mariposas  
se dependen del las paredes,  
grises como la hora.*

(LaMadrid, 12)

*6:30 P.M.*

*Night moths  
detach themselves from walls  
grey as the hour.*

(LaMadrid, 13)



Tablada also makes frequent use of humor, as in "La araña" ("The Spider"):

*LA ARAÑA*

*Recorriendo su tela  
esta luna clarísima  
tiene a la araña en vela.*

Traveling through the web  
this brilliant moon  
traps the spider

(Un día ... ; *Hadman*, 1987, 28)

Fleitas (15) remarks that:

This haiku is full of serene humor. The use of rhyme and assonance is clearly noticeable ... he builds a perfect rhythm by using natural pauses of speech. The three moments of the haiku ... are perfectly linked, and a natural, spontaneous fluency takes command of the poem.

Fleitas' comments refer to the Spanish original. Our translation, however, loses the rhyme, much of the assonance, and some of the irony and humor but maintains natural speech and enhances the brevity. Some readers might complain that this haiku is flawed because of its conceit, but both early and current Spanish poets often use poetic devices of various kinds, for to them the haiku is a form of poetry, not the demonstration of a philosophical or religious attitude. In this they were not unlike the majority of the foremost Japanese haiku poets, both ancient and modern (Yasuda, 10–11; Ueda, 22–23). It is also likely that Spanish-language haiku poets were influenced by the *seguidilla*, which was heavily dependent on metaphors, similes, rhythm, rhyme, and conceits.

The following poem illustrates clearly Tablada's interest in experimentation:

*LAS NUBES*

*/ de los Andes van veloces,  
Las nubes / de montaña en montaña,  
/ en alas de los cóndores.*

(Obras. I–Poesía; *Hadman*, 1987, 27)



/ of the Andes are swift,  
 The clouds / of mountains within mountains,  
 / in wings of the condors

(Hadman, 2001, 5)

Hadman (2001, 5) notes that “the phrase, ‘The clouds,’ written once but read by the reader three times, once for each line, is a very creative innovation.” He translates *de montaña en montaña* as “of mountains within mountains,” however, when arguably the more accurate translation would be “from mountain to mountain / on wings of condors.”

José Juan Tablada is a seminal figure in North American haiku: he was the first not only to publish a haiku, but to publish a haiku collection. Nevertheless, he was only one of several influential Mexican poets who were innovating with the form in the early part of the twentieth century. Some of Tablada’s contemporaries who also contributed to making the haiku an important part of the literature of Mexico were Carlos Gutiérrez Cruz, Rafael Lozano, Francisco Monterde, and José Rubén Romero.

CARLOS GUTIÉRREZ CRUZ (1897–1930)

During his short life, Carlos Gutiérrez Cruz, a friend of Tablada’s, acquired a considerable reputation: “He has been described as a revolutionary poet, socialist poet, political poet, humanist poet, and haiku poet” (Hadman, 2002, 1). In 1919 Gutiérrez Cruz published haiku in the Guadalajara newspaper *El informador*. His first book of poetry, *Bestiario* (“Bestiary”), published in 1920, contains 56 poems on animal themes (Hadman, 1987, 12; González de Mendoza, 2002, 6). Here are two examples:

# LOS RATONES

*Los ratones detras de la mampara,  
 Escriben a máquina*

Behind the wall the mice  
 tap out a message

(González de Mendoza, 7)

# EL PELÍCANO

*Cafetera de porcelana  
 que va flotando por el agua.*

# PELICAN

Porcelain coffeepot  
 floating on the water.

(González de Mendoza, 7)



In 1923 he published *Cómo piensa la plebe* ("What the Masses Think"), a *haikai* pamphlet of libertarian propaganda (González de Mendoza, 2002, 6). Hadman (1987, 12) states that the only examples of which he is aware of Mexican haiku written about political issues are those of Gutiérrez Cruz (with a few by Tablada and José Rubén Romero). Gutiérrez Cruz's reputation is primarily that of a revolutionary poet. By 1924, with the publication of *Sangre roja. Poemas libertarios*, ("Red Blood. Poems of Liberty"), his focus was on violent social protest and the injustices experienced by the working class (Gutiérrez, 2002, 1). His poetry evidently inspired Diego Rivera, who not only shared his views, but did the cover illustration for *Sangre roja* (Gutiérrez, 2002, 1–2).

This revolutionary impetus can clearly be seen in the following poem (regardless of whether one translates "armas" as "hands," "arms," or "weapons").

*Como tú no tienes nada,  
tienes que matar a los ricos  
con sus propias armas.*

Since you have nothing,  
you have to kill the rich  
with your own hands.

(Hadman, 1987, 33)

Gutiérrez Cruz's communist leanings did not, however, preclude his exercising his Catholic faith; indeed, he perceived the struggle of the proletariat to be a holy war with Jesus Christ as a companion in the struggle (Gutiérrez, 2002, 1).

#### RAFAEL LOZANO (1899–19??)

Rafael Lozano was another of Tablada's contemporaries. The two men knew each other and shared an interest in French poetry (Hadman, 1987, 13). Lozano published *La alondra encandilada* ("The Dazzling Skylark") in Madrid in 1921. This book contains a separate section of forty-eight haiku subtitled "Libro de estampas" ("Stamp Album"), and a few haiku are to be found in other sections as well. The principal themes are love, philosophy, music, and dance. Here is an example translated by LaMadrid and Mares (16–17):

*Un beso.  
Y tú cierras los ojos,  
igual que ante un abismo.*

A kiss.  
And you close your eyes,  
as if before an abyss.



Here are further examples from Cisneros Cox (14):

*Llena de lilas,  
traía flores en las manos  
y en las pupilas*

Filled with lilacs  
I brought flowers in my hands  
and in my eyes

*El barco  
deja sólo una estela.  
nosotros, ¿que dejamos?*

The boat  
leaves a wake  
and we, what do we leave?

*Danzando,  
finge ella un candelabro  
que el viento va apagando*

Dancing,  
she imitates a candelabra  
being blown by the wind

In the following year (1922) Lozano edited an anthology, *Haikais*, written in French and published in Paris (Hadman, 1987). Both Lozano and Tablada made great contributions in the translation of French poetry, and indeed the influence of French haiku poets on Mexican writers was greater than that of the Japanese (Hadman, 1987). Lozano never published another book of haiku after *Haikais*, but thirty-one years later, in 1953, he wrote an article, published in Caracas, about Japanese haiku and tanka (Hadman, 1987).

#### FRANCISCO MONTERDE (1894–1985)

Francisco Monterde y García Icazbalceta also published his first work during the initial haiku movement in Mexico. His 1923 book, *Itinerario contemplativo* (“Contemplative Travels”), was based on observations made during his frequent train journeys between Mexico City and Veracruz (Hadman, 1987, 15; González de Mendoza, 2002). Hadman (1987) notes that Monterde was an excellent student of Tablada’s and understood that haiku is not merely a capricious poem of three lines or an instant snapshot. In *Itinerario contemplativo* Monterde managed to capture specific details of his native culture by shaping his direct experience with an imaginative touch. Then, like many other Mexican poets, Monterde abandoned haiku for a period—in his case for thirty-nine years—likely owing to the demands of the numerous academic and



governmental posts that he held during those years. His second book, *Netsuke*, was published in 1962, closely followed by *Sakura* in 1963. Both of these books also detail his travels, but perhaps less imaginatively than before. The first is based on travels in Japan and the second on a trip to Japan and Egypt (Hadman, 1987). In 1975 Monterde was awarded Mexico's Premio Nacional de Letras (Academia, 2).

The following poems of Monterde's (Hadman, 1987, 45–46) strongly evoke the landscape, from the mountains of central Mexico to the Gulf of Mexico at Veracruz.

## LEJANÍA

*En la suave curva  
de las colinas  
carne morena ondula.*

## FAR AWAY

In the smooth curve  
of hills  
dark flesh undulates.

## TÚNEL

*Sol.  
Un paréntesis de sombra ...  
Y otra vez el sol.*

## TUNNEL

Sun.  
(A parenthesis of shade ...)  
And again the sun.

## EN LA MONTAÑA

*Tren subiendo la montaña  
oruga sobre una manzana.*

Train climbing the mountain  
caterpillar on an apple.

## LUNA EN EL MAR

*De las aguas,  
la luna saca a flote  
la plata que se hundió con los piratas.*

Rising to the surface  
the pirates' sunken silver  
moon on the sea.

## JOSÉ RUBÉN ROMERO (1890–1952)

A writer of novels and short stories, José Rubén Romero published a book of haiku in 1922 entitled *Tacámbaro*, the name of the village in Michoacán state where he was born and lived. While Monterde wrote about his journeys, Romero focused on one *pueblo*. He takes the



reader to the village—to its events and places of interest, to meet its inhabitants—and he details a whole year of fiestas and celebrations, month by month (Hadman, 1987). The following haiku by Romero (Cisneros Cox, 11–12) illustrate his focus on rural Mexico; anyone who has been there will remember the livestock, the rodents, and, especially, the fireworks.

*EL GRANERO*

*Buscando huevos de gallina  
por los rincones del granero,  
hallé los senos de mi prima*

*El pueblo,  
panorama de nacimiento:  
un buey, un gallo y un jumento*

*EL RATÓN*

*Enigmático despertador:  
de día provocas risa  
de noche infundes terror*

*SEPTIEMBRE DIECISÉIS*

*El cohete de luces, ebrio de libertad,  
reta a las estrellas de la inmensidad.*

(Hadman, 1987, 40)

THE BARN

Searching for eggs  
in the corners of the barn  
I found my cousin's breasts

The village  
is a nativity scene:  
an ox, a rooster, a donkey

THE RAT

Strange alarm clock:  
laughed at by day  
instilling terror at night

SEPTEMBER THE SIXTEENTH

The giddiness of liberty:  
fireworks  
brighter than the stars.



Romero occasionally embraced political themes, but for the most part his haiku are centered on his little town and its events:

LA PLAZUELA

*Sesión permanente.  
Los viejos del pueblo discuten  
la honra de toda la gente.*

(LaMadrid, 18)

SMALL PLAZA

Permanent session.  
The old men of the town discuss  
the honor of all its people.

(LaMadrid, 19)

Tablada, Gutiérrez Cruz, Lozano, Monterde, and Romero each produced significant collections of haiku in the first quarter of the twentieth century, a generation before the Beat poets began experimenting with the form. In Mexico they sowed the seeds of a deep-rooted interest in the haiku genre that continues to this day. In the conclusion of this article, we will focus on these developments.

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## ESSAY

*George Swede and Anita Krumins*

### THE MEXICAN HAIKU, PART TWO: AFTER THE PIONEERS\*

In "The Mexican Haiku, Part One" (*Modern Haiku*, 35.1) we showed that interest in this Japanese poetic form occurred significantly earlier in Mexico than in Canada and the United States. Our focus was on five haiku pioneers, all born in the late 1800s, who produced the best and most influential work, mainly during the first half of the twentieth century. In this concluding article, we chart the haiku directions taken by later generations of poets, including those in their prime today.

The five Mexican haiku pioneers wrote longer poems as well as a significant number of haiku and were nationally known. Thus, they seem similar to five early American poets often cited as English-language pioneers of haiku: Ezra Pound, Amy Lowell, William Carlos Williams, Wallace Stevens, and Charles Reznikoff. In reality, however, the two groups were different insofar as the Americans produced only a few genuine haiku (Swede). The reason the five Mexican pioneers were more prolific and skilled than their American counterparts at producing haiku was likely due to the earlier influence of Japan on Mexico than on the U.S. and Canada.

We selected the poets in Part Two from a large sample of haiku writers, none of whom, however, was known specially as a haiku writer. This was unexpected, considering the large number of haiku specialists in Canada and the U.S. All of the present-day Mexican poets in our sample have written other kinds of poetry as well as prose, fiction, and nonfiction. In this they followed a path similar to the Mexican haiku pioneers. It seems that to date Mexican haiku writers have felt no need to form haiku societies as in Canada and the U.S. We suspect that the reasons are due to Mexico's earlier haiku history and its greater number of major writers with a serious interest in the form.

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In Part Two we provide a sampling of haiku from post-pioneer poets to those of the present day. Our survey proceeds chronologically, and we have not attempted to analyze the poems in a critical sense, expecting that the haiku will speak for themselves. We have chosen poems that we consider to be the best by each author, and we also indicate any major literary honors the authors have received. The frequency of such entries underlies one of our main points — how deeply the haiku lies within the core of Mexican letters.

From our research, which involved a four-month stay in Mexico, we came away with the distinct impression that most Mexican writers, unlike their counterparts in Canada and the United States, are very protective of their privacy, often neglecting to provide what we consider vital statistics, such as educational background, where they live and work, as well as date and place of birth. We have attempted to provide a sense of where each writer lies in the spectrum of Mexican letters, but for some current poets we were unable to determine where they fit into the chronology.

ALFONSO REYES (1889–1959)

Typical of Mexican writers and artists, Reyes was in the diplomatic service and for many years served as Mexico's ambassador to Spain. In 1945 Reyes was the first winner of the National Prize for Sciences and Arts (Language and Literature), Mexico's major writing award, the equivalent to winning either the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry (in the U.S.) or the Governor General's Medal (in Canada).

TARDE

*Leve piel de nube  
donde anda clavada  
la astilla de luna.*

AFTERNOON

Light skin of cloud  
where a splinter  
of moon is impaled.

(LaMadrid, 14–15)

CARLOS PELLICER (1899–1977)

A political prisoner during the 1930s, Pellicer traveled extensively for most of his adult life, both privately and as a cultural attaché for Mexico (Tapscott, 153). He was the winner of the National Prize for Sciences and Arts, in Literature in 1964.



*Pasan por la acera  
lo mismo el cura, que la vaca  
y que la luz postrera.*

Passing on the street  
they are the same — the priest  
the cow and the last light.

(Hadman, 37)

JOSÉ GOROSTIZA (1901–1973)

Gorostiza was one of the founding members of the Contemporáneos group in Mexico during the 1920s, which challenged the nationalism found in Mexican arts and letters after the revolution (Tapscott, 157). He was the winner of the National Prize for Sciences and Arts (Languages and Literature) in 1968.

ELEGIA

*A veces  
me dan ganas de llorar,  
pero las suple el mar.*

ELEGY

Sometimes  
I feel the need to cry,  
but the sea does it for me.

(LaMadrid, 26–27)

JAIME TORRES BODET (1902–1974)

In Guadalajara there is a small square named after Torres Bodet that includes a performance theater. The inscription on his statue reads, “Great humanist, educator, poet, diplomat and illustrious Mexican.” One of the posts he held was director-general of UNESCO in the late 1950s (Tapscott, 181). He was the winner of the National Prize for Sciences and Arts (Language and Literature) in 1966.

LLUVE

*Vas a llorar pronto.  
Ya el cielo se hace  
chiquito en tus ojos.*

RAIN

You will cry soon.  
The sky already becomes  
small in your eyes.

(LaMadrid, 28–29)



## EFRAÍN HUERTA (1914–1982)

**T**rained as a lawyer, Huerta became a professional journalist and film critic (Tapscott). For many haiku poets Huerta's minimalist work would not qualify as haiku, but for us it has echoes of the Japanese haiku poets Tomizawa Kakio and Kaneko Tōta (*see* Ueda). Huerta won the National Prize for Sciences and Arts (Language and Literature) in 1976.

*PASEO I**Ahorita**Vengo**Voy a dar**un paseo**Alrededor**De**Mi**Vida*

## EXCURSION I

I'll come  
right backI'm going  
To take

A walk

Around

My

Life

*Ya vine*

I'm back

*PASEO II**No**Me tardo**Voy a dar**Una vuelta**Alrededor**De**Mi**Muerte*

## EXCURSION II

I won't  
be long

I'm going

To take

A spin

Around

My death

....

....

(LaMadrid, 38–39)



## OCTAVIO PAZ (1914–1998)

To the world literary audience Paz is not known as having written haiku, yet his earlier work published in the 1930s to the 1950s contains many short poems, “some of only three lines approaching the haiku form” (Kirkup, 27). In 1957, due no doubt in part to his diplomatic posting in Japan, Paz helped to create the first translation of Bashō’s work into Spanish (Fleitas). Paz also collaborated in a 1970 renga sequence with three other well-known poets of the time, the Italian Eduardo Sanguinetti, the Frenchman Jacques Roubaud, and the Englishman Charles Tomlinson (Kirkup). Actually, Paz’s interest in Japanese poetics was lifelong, for his 1987 collection, *Árbol adentro* (*A Tree Within*) contains a number of haiku-like stanzas (often with subtitles) within poems as well as a true haiku sequence called “Basho-An” about the poet Matsuo Bashō’s tiny hut near Kyoto where he stayed for a short while in 1670 and which still stands today (Paz, 157). According to Fleitas, “we owe to the Mexican writer, not only his contribution to a deep comprehension of haiku as poetry, but also its critical and historical implications.” Paz won the the National Prize for Sciences and Arts (Language and Literature) in 1977 and the 1990 Nobel Prize for Literature.

## APARICIÓN

*Si el hombre es polvo  
esos que andan por el llano  
son hombres*

## APPARITION

If man is dust  
those that wander across the plain  
are men

(LaMadrid, 32–33)

## [The first stanza of “Basho-An” (Paz, 6–7)]

*El mundo cabe  
en diecisiete sílabas;  
tú en esta choza.*

The whole world fits in-  
to seventeen syllables,  
and you in this hut.



## DOS EN UNO

*Baja  
desnuda*

*la luna  
por el pozo*

*la mujer  
por mis ojos*

two in one

Naked  
descends

the moon  
through the well

the woman  
through my eyes

(LaMadrid, 32–33)

## JUAN CERVERA (1933– )

Cervera was born in Seville, Spain, but has lived in Mexico since 1968. A poet, novelist, and editor, he publishes his work in both Mexico and Spain (Cervera).

*Al caer, la hoja  
sueña por un instante  
que es ala y ola*

The falling leaf  
dreams it is — for an instant—  
a wing and a wave

(Savina, 346)

*Sigue habitada  
de algo más que silencio  
la vieja casa*

It continues lived in  
by something more than silence  
the old house

(Savina, 347)



## ELVA MACÍAS (1944- )

Macías works with the Centre for Literacy and Cultural Development at the National Autonomous University of Mexico. She was the winner of the Carlos Pellicer Prize for poetry in 1994.

## NOSTALGIA

*Girasol*

*que aun arrancado de su tallo  
sigue atento al desplazamiento del sol.*

## NOSTALGIA

## Sunflower

even when torn from its stem  
still attends to the sun's course.

(LaMadrid, 52-53)

## NORBERTO DE LA TORRE GONZÁLEZ (1947- )

De la Torre González works at the Autonomous University of San Luis Potosí. In an essay on the haiku, "El universo en un sombrero," del la Torre states, "The haiku is end and beginning; it encapsulates a trance, a spiritual experience, and expanded vision." The following haiku were selected from over forty attached to the end of his essay.

*Las aves callan.*

*La jacaranda canta  
con su follaje.*

The birds are quiet.

The jacaranda sings  
with its foliage.

*El viento llora  
mientras busca su lecho  
entre las hojas.*

The wind cries  
while it searches for its bed  
among the leaves.

*Tras la ventana  
un rayo de silencio  
dibuja sombras.*

Behind the window  
a ray of silence  
draws shadows.

*Con líneas de luz  
el sol inventa tigres  
en los jardines.*

With lines of light  
the sun invents jaguars  
in the gardens.



## GABRIELA RÁBAGO PALAFOX (1950–)

A resident of Mexico City, Palafox writes poetry, children's stories, novels, and television scripts (Hadman). She won the National Children's Short Story Prize in 1977.

*La luna es hostia  
amasada por monjas  
meditabundas.*

Communion wafer  
for meditative nuns:  
the moon.

(Hadman, 72)

*Felino negro,  
la noche se despierta  
paso a paso.*

Like a black cat  
the night awakens itself  
little by little

(Hadman, 72)

## ARTURO GONZÁLEZ COSÍO (19??–)

Writer and politician, González Cosío won the Xavier Villaurrutia Prize in 1984 for his collection *Pequeño bestiario ilustrado* ("Small Illustrated Bestiary") which contains twenty-eight haiku and tanka with elaborate illustrations. The use of art with haiku to create haiga was introduced by José Juan Tablada to Mexico and was revived by this collection (Hadman). In 1999, González Cosío published another collection, *Otras mutaciones del I Ching*, in which one of his haiku accompanies each of the hexagrams of the Chinese book of changes. The following haiku come from Hadman (74–75).

*La abeja visita  
con armas iguales  
a la rosa.*

With the same weapons  
the bee visits  
the rose.

*Lluvia torrencial.  
Después queda la verde  
Superficie de la rana.*

Torrential rain.  
Afterwards the green  
skin of the frog.

*Concierto de tantas voces,  
canta un cenzonile  
en el claro del bosque.*

So many voices in concert,  
the song of a wren  
in a clearing of the forest.



*En selvática espesura  
como fruto anterior al Paratso  
cuelga el áspid.*

In the forest undergrowth  
like the former fruit in paradise  
hangs the asp.

*La sombra del tigre  
— oscura pantera —,  
copia minuciosa  
de lo que no es.*

The shadow of the jaguar  
— a dark panther — ,  
copies meticulously  
what is not.

JORGE MARTÍNEZ RUIZ (1952– )

Martínez Ruiz publishes poetry, fiction and literary criticism as well as articles about the role of communication in the preservation of the environment, particularly Mexico's sources of water. In 2001 he published a collection, *Meditación*, on the Web site *El Rincón del Haiku* (Martínez Ruiz, 2002a), and his views on haiku regularly appear on the interactive part of the same site, *Foro de Haiku*. In an interview with us in Guadalajara, Martínez Ruiz made clear that he eschews slavish imitation of the classical Japanese haiku. For him, the shortness of the form makes it ideal for expressing intense feeling caused by a momentary experience with nature. Rules such as 5-7-5 can impede what Martínez Ruiz feels must be a natural process of poetic creation.

The following poems are taken from *Meditación*, which contains 100 haiku on seven aspects of the natural and human worlds: birds, flowers, insects, rain, the cosmos, love, and the poet.

*Al amanecer  
todavía conversan  
luna y jazmín.*

Almost dawn  
and still they converse  
moon and jasmine.

*Piso la yerba  
y el humilde anís  
la luz perfuma.*

I trample the grass  
and the humble anise  
perfumes the light.

*Bebes y dejas  
en el vaso un beso  
que me bebo yo.*

You drink and leave  
in the glass a kiss  
that I drink.



*Fin de las lluvias,  
el sendero se cubre  
de anís en flor.*

The end of the rains,  
the path covers itself  
in anise blooms.

*Esa cigarra,  
tras su metamorfosis,  
murió sin cantar.*

This cicada,  
after its metamorphosis,  
died without singing.

ROBERTO VALLARINO (1955–2002)

Journalist, literary magazine editor, novelist and poet, Vallarino died of diabetes at the age of forty-seven.

*El océano se encuentra  
Con un pez en la mano  
Y la luna muerta*

The ocean finds itself  
With a fish in its hand  
And the dead moon

(LaMadrid, 66–67)

OLGA MARÍA DEL CARMEN ORTEGA CHARLES (19??– )

Ortega Charles has a presence on the Internet almost as strong as that of Martínez Ruiz. Her haiku “En la laguna” earned honorable mention in the 1991 Japan Airlines Haiku Contest, and in 1996 she published a collection that primarily comprised haiku, *Haikús, aposiciones y otros duendes* (“Haiku, Appositions and Other Spirits”).

*En la laguna,  
prenden los pescadores  
trozos de luna.*

In the lagoon,  
the fishermen catch  
scales of moon.

*Casa sin puertas  
llueven sobre el tejado  
las hojas muertas.*

House without doors  
dead leaves rain  
on the roof.

RAMÓN IVÁN SUÁREZ CAAMAL (1950– )

Suárez Caamal is a writer, teacher, administrator, and editor, but he is perhaps best known for Syan Caan, the literary workshop that he founded in



1986 in a small village in the south of Quintana Roo state, where he teaches children and teenagers to appreciate and to write all kinds of poetry, including haiku (Morales). A 1996 compilation of haiku by these students is called *El Universo en un gota de rocío* ("The Universe in a Drop of Dew").

Many of the students at Syan Caan have won awards in various competitions (Morales); of particular interest to us is their successful involvement in the World's Children's Haiku Contest, held in Osaka, Japan, in 1990, a competition that received 60,000 entries from 26 countries. Suárez Caamal has also written a manual that describes his method of teaching and generating student interest in poetry, including haiku. This manual has been republished and distributed in various forms and venues and has influenced a growing number of teachers to follow in his footsteps and to establish workshops of their own (Morales).

Suárez Caamal has written haiku himself—some of them, not surprisingly, on the theme of writing:

*Cerca del agua  
flexibles juncos pescan  
estas palabras.*

At water's edge  
supple reeds  
trap these words.

*Azul la tarde,  
las bandadas de patos  
oscuros versos.*

Blue afternoon,  
the flock of ducks  
gloomy verses.

*Claro que quiero,  
lago, mojar mi pluma  
en tu tintero.*

Lake,  
of course, I would love to  
dip my pen in your inkwell.

This last haiku by Suárez Caamal deals with impermanence, with the ebb and flow of creativity, but one could also think of it as a statement regarding translation — as a different language washes over the original, each word change is a new wave.

*El mar escribe  
sus versos en la arena  
y los corrige.*

The sea writes  
its poems in the sand  
and then rewrites them.

The issue of language brings us to one of our central discoveries. Much to our surprise, most of the Mexican poets showed little interest in poetry (or poetry organizations) north of their border. They identify themselves as Spanish-speakers rather than as North Americans and interact with writers and



publishers in Spain as much as with those in Central and South America. We can all hope there will be more interchange between poets writing haiku in Mexico and those of us writing north of the Rio Grande.

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