

Charles Trumbull

Pedro Xisto and Brazilian Haiku

Brazil has a long and distinguished tradition in haiku marked by milestones that in many ways parallel and often antedate developments in North America. Brazil has benefited both by the formal and aesthetic principles it gleaned from close cultural contact with Portugal and France and direct contacts among members of the sizable Japanese immigration in the country. Pedro Xisto (1901–1987) was an important figure in the history of Brazilian haiku, although he came to the movement from an unusual direction. He was primarily known as a concrete poet, and it was probably for this aspect of his life work that he will best be remembered. In order to place him and his work in context, we present some highlights of Brazilian haiku history, a sketch of Xisto's life, a few of his haiku, and one of his concrete poems.

The Japanese immigration to Brazil began in 1908. Shortly thereafter, this haiku (in Japanese), was composed by Hyōkotsu (Shuhei Uetsoka, 1876–1935); it is supposed to have been the first haiku written in Brazil:

*A nau imigrante
chegando: vê-se lá no alto
a cascata seca*

The immigrant ship
arrives: visible on the ridge
the dry waterfall¹

Afrânio Peixoto, a writer of popular romances, is credited with attempting a definition of *haikai* as early as 1919 in his book *Trovas populares brasileiras* ("Brazilian Popular Ballads"). In 1928 he published an article about *haikai*. Peixoto published some 50 original haiku among other poems in *Missangus* (1931).

Waldomiro Siqueira Jr. (b. 1912) read Venceslau de Moraes's *Relance da alma japonesa* (1925; "A Glimpse into the Japanese Soul") and was profoundly influenced by it. Siqueira's *Haikais* (1933) was the first Brazilian book devoted exclusively to haiku. Five volumes of his planned ten-volume *Haicais reunidos* ("Collected Haiku") had appeared by 1989.

Another pillar of the Brazilian haiku movement is H. Masuda Goga, who was born in Kagawa province, Japan, in 1911 and emigrated to Brazil in 1929. He was a disciple of Nenpuku Satō, a leading haiku master among the Japanese immigrants in Brazil. After writing haiku

in Japanese for a number of years, Masuda Goga published his first haiku in Portuguese in 1943. His 1986 historical work *Burajiru no haikai* was published in Tokyo and translated into Portuguese under the title *O haikai no Brasil* (1988; "The Haiku in Brazil").

Jorge Fonseca Jr. (1912–1985) became interested in the haiku genre in 1934, met and studied with Masuda Goga, and published *Roteiro lírico* ("Lyrical Journey"), his first book of haiku, in 1939. Other key early figures in Brazilian haiku include Oldegar Franco Viera (b. 1915), who in 1940 came out with his collection, *Folhas de chá* ("Tea Leaves"), and in 1957 published a study *O Haikai* ("The Haiku"), and Fanny Luiza Dupré (born 1911) who had worked on her collection *Pétalas ao vento* ("Petals in the Wind") from before the outbreak of World War II and published it in 1949. This was the first book of haiku by a woman in Brazil.

Pedro Xisto Pereira de Carvalho was born in Limoeiro, Pernambuco state, Brazil, on Aug. 6, 1901, and died in São Paulo on July 17, 1987. He graduated from the Law Faculty at the University of Recife (1922) and worked as a state prosecutor and professor of literature. At various times he served as cultural attaché in Bolivia, Canada, the United States, and Japan. While employed in the latter post, Xisto became interested in things Japanese, and he was thenceforth a great popularizer of Japanese culture in Brazil. He was a cofounder of the Aliança Cultural Brasil-Japão, which is, among other things, the leading publisher of haiku in Brazil. He married the painter Hebe de Carvalho in 1936.

Xisto began writing and publishing haiku, concrete poems, and "inventions" (*criação*) in the 1950s. He was part of the Concretist movement from 1956, but he approached visual poetry from the standpoint of Oriental culture and modern physics rather than through association with the main Concretist movement in Brazil, called the Noigandres group. He was associated with the Concretist journal *Invenção* from the time that the group broke from the *Jornal do Brasil*. (1960).

Xisto's publications include *haikais & concretos* (1960; "Haiku and Concrete Poems"), *8 haikais* (1960; "8 Haiku"), *Logogramas* (1966), *a e i o u; ou Vogaláxia* (1966; "a e i o u, or a VocaliGalaxy," a book-length poem), *caminho* (1979; "Road," haiku), and *partículas* (1984; "Particles," haiku). In its issue for February 1961 the review *Kokage* ("Tree Shade") published "Intercâmbio de Traduções de Haiku" ("Interchange of Haiku Translations"), with Xisto's translations of Japanese haiku

together with renderings of his haiku into Japanese by Masuda Goga and Hiromi Hoshino. Xisto's poems and haiku have been used in other media as well: his poem "babel" was included in an electronic poetry show at the University of Toronto in the 1970s, his book *Caminhos* was adapted for dance by the poet's daughter, Lia Robatto, in São Paulo in 1981, and *8 haikais* was set to music by the German-Brazilian composer Hans Joachim Koellreutter in the 1980s. Two of Xisto's concrete works can be viewed on the Web at the URLs given in the Notes, below.

A large, active haiku community flourishes today in Brazil and still reflects its dual Asian-European heritage. The Grêmio Haicai Ipê, the Brazilian national haiku organization, was formed in May 1987 by Masuda Goga, the poet Roberto Saito (born 1942), and Francisco Handa (born 1955) the editor of *Portal*, a Japanese-Brazilian magazine.

Haiku by Pedro Xisto²

*o sol renascido
além do mar: verde azul
ouro flor e brasa*

the sun reborn
across the sea: blue green
gold flower and ember³

*a ave agora pausa
sôbre o ramo de bambu
na noite uma flauta*

on the bamboo branch
the bird has settled now
a flute in the night⁴

*olhas em meus olhos
e não vêes senão a ti
—a múltipla a mínima*

you look into my eyes
and see nothing else but you
—the multiple, the minimum

*ris do meu retiro
estrêlas e borboletas
vivem lá comigo*

laugh at my seclusion
stars and butterflies
live there with me

*em hôrto de monges
crisálida espera as asas
frêmito de fronds*

in the monks' garden
the chrysalis waits for wings
the fronds are rustling

*a criança nua
de todo cata no lôdo
farrapos de lua*

naked child
searching for shards of moonlight
in the mud

*alvorece: patos
ariscos o rio riscam
e o sono dos sapos*

dawning: ducks
surely surly straddle the stream
and the torpor of toads

*fim do rio o mar
fim do mar no fim do sol
fim do sol em mim*

end of the river the sea
end of the sea in the set of the sun
end of the sun in me

*no fundo do lago
o tempo (sal e silêncio)
neva em tiahuanaco*

on the lake bottom
time (salt & silence)
snowy tiahuanaco⁵

*passa prêto passa
lua branca branca lua
passa prêto pássaro*

passes black posset
moon white white moon
passes black passerine

*casa-de-purgar
purga o prêto prêto açúcar
que banzo bangüê*

refinery house
refines the black-black sugar
what a baleful barrow⁶

EPITHALMIUM II⁷

he = Ple
& = e
she = ela

S = serpens
h = homo
e = eva

Notes

- ¹ Douglas Eden explains the scene as follows: a Japanese immigrant on the ship sees a stone shining far off on the *altiplano*, the mainland ridge. The stone is shining because it is covered of a thin film of water from the humidity of the vegetation. It is winter, the dry season, but later the rains will make a waterfall over the stone.
- ² Xisto's haiku are all from *haikais & concretos* (1960); translations by Charles Trumbull with the assistance of Douglas Eden Brotto and Yara Shimada Brotto.
- ³ This apparently refers to Brazil ("the sun reborn") symbolized by the flag (which is colored blue, green, and gold) and the word *brasa*, "ember" or "coal"; the name Brazil (*Brasil* in Portuguese) comes from *pau brasil*, a wood of a bright red color that has been exported from this region for centuries.
- ⁴ This is surely an allusion to Bashō's famous verse: "on a withered branch / the crow

has settled — / autumn dusk.”

- ⁵ Tiahuanaco was the center of an ancient civilization at Lake Titicaca, Bolivia; it is believed by some to be the oldest city in the world and by others to have been founded by extraterrestrials.
- ⁶ *Bangüê* is a handbarrow that was used to transport cane husks by the black slaves who worked on Brazilian sugar plantations. The word is also used to mean the sluice for the sugar juice, the sugar mill itself, and a kind of stretcher used to carry off dead slaves.
- ⁷ “Epithalmium II” originally appeared in *Invenção* 5 (1957) and was reprinted in *Concrete Poetry*, 114. The poem also appears on the World Wide Web at <<http://www.ubu.com/historical/xisto/xisto.html>>. Permission to reproduce the poem here was given by Willis Barnstone. Another of Xisto’s concrete poems, “Epithalmium III” can be viewed on the Web at <<http://www.ektoplasma.no/diktsentral/konkret.html>>.

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