



Bacellar and Beça: An exercise of Haiku Translation

Bacellar e Beça: um exercício de tradução de haikai

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Abstract: Haiku as a poetic genre is widespread in many places around the world. In Brazil, where there is the largest population of Japanese descendants apart from Japan itself, haikai was assimilated in two ways: through Brazilian poets writing in Portuguese and immigrant poets writing in Japanese. Haikai in Portuguese was assimilated and adapted, combining it with local vocabulary related to the equally specific nature of each region. In Amazonas, two of the greatest exponents of haikai are the poets Luiz Bacellar and Aníbal Beça. This paper briefly presents some of their poems found in the books "Satori", by Bacellar, and "Folhas da Selva", by Beça. As a niche to explore, we have selected some that use synesthetic resources, in order to translate them and, in this exercise, reflect on translation choices.

Keywords: haiku; Amazon; translation; synesthesia.

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Resumo: O haikai como gênero poético é difundido em muitos lugares do mundo. No Brasil, onde há a maior população de descendentes de japoneses além do próprio Japão, o haikai foi assimilado de duas maneiras: por meio de poetas brasileiros escrevendo em português e poetas imigrantes escrevendo em japonês. O haikai em português foi assimilado e adaptado, combinando-o com o vocabulário local relacionado à natureza igualmente específica de cada região. No Amazonas, dois dos maiores expoentes do haikai são os poetas Luiz Bacellar e Aníbal Beça. Este artigo apresenta brevemente alguns de seus poemas encontrados nos livros "Satori", de Bacellar, e "Folhas da Selva", de Beça. Como nicho a ser explorado, selecionamos alguns que utilizam recursos sinestésicos, a fim de traduzi-los e, nesse exercício, refletir sobre as escolhas tradutórias.

Palavras-chave: haikai; Amazônia; tradução; sinestesia.



INTRODUCTION

Haiku, a genuinely Japanese poetry genre, reached Brazil basically through two different routes: one through Europe/France and the other with the Japanese immigrants that came to Brazil from 1908 and the following years (MASUDA, 1988, p. 29-30). Opening the first route, Brazilian poet Afrânio Peixoto, who did not get to know haiku through originally Japanese sources, read a book by Paul-Louis Couchoud (1879-1959), a Frenchman who lived in Japan between 1903 and 1904. Couchoud had greater contact with Japanese culture through other Europeans living in Japan (Franchetti, 2012, p. 199). He studied Chamberlain's monograph entitled "Bashô and the Japanese Poetical Epigram", published a few articles in French magazines, and illustrated them with around a hundred haikus, most of them written in English.

After Peixoto, other Brazilian poets, amid the same wave of Japonism whose presence was felt in the Modernist movement, in the early 19th century, started to experiment on the newly discovered minimalist genre. Since then, with different tones, characteristics, and backgrounds, Brazilian poets have engaged in this poetic exercise. Once nature plays a vital role in haiku as a genre, it is obvious that there would be multiple possibilities for haiku to flourish in a country with six distinct biomes.

In the North, in the state of Amazonas, writer Samuel Benchimol (1923 - 2003) was the first to sparsely publish haikus between 1942 and 1945. However, it was Luiz Bacellar who became known for introducing haiku in the capital Manaus, arousing the interest of other poets in the cult of the short poetic expression. Bacellar's book "O crisântemo de cem pétalas" (The Chrysanthemum of a Hundred Petals), published in 1985 and written in partnership with Roberto Evangelista, also a haikuist from Amazonas, was usually considered to be the kickstart for Amazonian haiku. In 1999, Bacellar published "Satori", his best-known haiku book. Other poets, like Aníbal Beça, were inspired by Bacellar's haiku and began their production.

Luiz Franco de Sá Bacellar (1928-2012) was a teacher, one of the founders of the Brazilian Writers' Union of Amazonas, and a member of the Amazonas Academy of Letters. He was honored with the Olavo Bilac Prize and the Amazonas State Poetry Prize (MELLO; SARMET, 2015). Aníbal Augusto Ferro de Madureira Beça Neto (1946-2009) was a journalist, writer, translator, and poet.

His haiku book, entitled "Folhas da Selva" (*Jungle Leaves*), published in 2006, is also a landmark in the history of haiku in Amazonas.

In this article, we focus on some of the poems by Anibal Beça and Luiz Bacellar from "Folhas da Selva" (2006) and "Satori" (2000) respectively, in an exercise of translation. The landscapes, the associated symbolic elements, and the specific stylistic resources that underpin the haiku poetry of these writers form the pillars of this enterprise. From this perspective, the analysis is driven in line with the thoughts of Franchetti & Doi (2012) and Masuda Goga (1986), relevant critical resources in the study of haiku in Brazil, here applied to the haiku production of Beça and Bacellar. Because we needed to select a group of poems for a limited enterprise - an article, not a thesis - we chose some poems that appeal to the senses and experimented on them.

In terms of aesthetics, the haiku shows the purity of meaning, an essence stripped bare and devoid of any props; the poetic truth derives precisely from this unveiling, and not from what is insinuated and remains hidden. Undressed nature then reverberates the flavor of life. The truth revealed in this poem is always silent, and unadorned, although it works by sharpening the individual's perception of the world that "remains latent, like an empty focus" (Nakagawa, 2008, p. 23). It therefore offers the possibility of sizing up the world according to the rain that splashes on the landscape closest to human apprehension.

Therefore, by interspersing the haiku poetry of Beça and Bacellar, we highlight some of the main elements of Amazonian haiku. Translating some of these poems into English is an attempt to make them known to those who are not Portuguese speakers. Since haiku is an appreciated genre all around the world, there must be readers, academics, and poetry lovers who wonder about how it was received in Brazil.

ANÍBAL BEÇA AND LUIZ BACELLAR

The poet Aníbal Augusto Ferro de Madureira Beça Neto (1946-2009) imprinted the dizzying and colorful world of Amazonian haiku on Amazonian poetry through *Folhas da Selva* (2006). In the poems that make up the work, Beça addresses the summer sun, the paths of the floodplains, the straws of

autumn, the branches of winter, and the stalks of spring. The language of his haiku encompasses a time that is practically impossible to access, in which the attempt to return is only achieved through the poetry that is envisioned.

In the dedication of *Folhas da Selva*, Beça tells the reader about the encouragement given by Luiz Bacellar concerning haiku production, signing the following dedication: “To the poet Luiz Bacellar, who introduced me to the magic and charm of haiku” (Beça, 2006, p. 7). He also pays homage to the poetry of Guilherme de Almeida and experiments on a duet with José Félix in the production of *renga*, obeying the number of 36 stanzas, for each season of the year, thus following the tradition of Bashô in the 17th century.

Luiz Franco de Sá Bacellar (1928-2012), on the other hand, inserts the book *Satori* (1999) into Amazonian haiku by using musical surroundings crossed by enchantment, imprinting an aura coated with words that illustrate the immensity of the Amazon's identity and poetry. Like Beça, he also brings the mysteries associated with life and the flow of eternity. By alluding to Bashô's Zen Buddhism, this work allows haiku poetry to offer a constant expansion of the present world, thus enabling greater contemplation of the beauty that can be captured in the small movement of things. Bashô is the inspiration and also a resource to Bacellar's haiku (FERREIRA, 2023, p. 75).

Speaking of haiku traditions, it is not the case that Bashô invented or altered the form of the haiku - only, as Paz (1983, p. 32) puts it, altered its meaning: beyond "pastime", Bashô's haikai becomes a "spiritual exercise". His talent presupposes a process, a path. According to Heyd (2003, p. 292), the journey welcomes the circumstances that are conducive to his poetry. It is not a question of a specific, prescriptive, infallible method for writing haikai - it's just about his way.

The book title is also very suggestive and meaningful: according to Perrone-Moisés (2001, p. 170), “satori is the revelation of reality in its reality, with the total modification of the existence of the person who experiences it; a rebirth, a recreation of the world and oneself”. Bacellar's *Satori* is a compilation of his haiku, published in 1985 in the book *O Crisântemo de Cem Pétalas*, coauthored with Roberto Evangelista.

SOME HAIKU IN TRANSLATION

Some will agree that haiku poems are favored by the Japanese language, precisely because it is rich in onomatopoeia, alliteration, and wordplay. Traditional haiku follows the scheme of three verses of five, seven, and five syllables. For creating haiku in the Brazilian context, and within the linguistic possibilities offered, Anibal Beça and Luiz Bacellar, as many other Brazilian poets, prefer to obey the category of meaning, leaving form (syllable number, for instance) to a second level.

Anibal Beça and Luiz Bacellar manage to weave, through the power of words and images, the winter rain of the Amazon and the expansion of the poetic moment that spring can offer. The celestial vault prolonged in nature's symphony alternates with the city's noise, the creaking of the river's water, which breaks the silence and propagates, in haiku form, the condensation of an image from a few words. Thus, the clarity found in the words chosen emphasizes the preparation of the architecturally elaborate world for the weaving of the verses. Nature and man end up merging in the contemplation of the folds of a single time but are divided into light and dark. In this sense, Paulo Franchetti (2012, p. 53) points out that haiku “is not synthesis, in the sense of saying the maximum with the minimum of words. Rather, it is the art of achieving enough with the minimum”.

The Amazonian haiku explores the permanent existence of poetry according to the diverse events and elements that make up the varied and vivid force of nature. The moon, for example, appears in countless descriptions: crescent moon, occult moon, moonrise, moon in the blackout, full moon, moon beaks, summer moon, the moon also bathes, same moon, round moons, yellow moon, moonlight, sickle moon, spring moon. However, each one is distinguished from the other by the resonance of its light on the man who contemplates it.

Similarly, the horizon is moved by the different determinations of the wind: the wind of candor, sensual; the wind on the sidewalk, whistling; the lull of the wind; the wind in the dry leaves; the autumn wind; the wind that is already blowing fine. The yearning for freedom contemplated in the poetry of Walt Whitman, in *Leaves of Grass*, emblematically advocating personal freedom, resurfaces in the haiku poetry of Beça and Bacellar: a universe intoxicated by the Amazonian land and the freedom of moving through scenes of nature that resonate echoes and senses in the soul and spirit of man, as illustrated by the following haiku:

Pétalas do ipê,
tapete roxo no chão —
o monge passeia.
(Beça, 2006, p. 52)

Ipe tree petals,
purple carpet on the ground —
the monk promenades.

There are plenty of synesthetic passages in Beça's book. Vibrant colors of the Amazon appeal to the reader-observer, as well as to the monk who takes a walk. It is a feast to the eyes, but also to the rest of the body, as the petals fall with the breeze felt in the air. This breeze may become stronger and turn into a wind that blows a made-up musical instrument that interweaves the senses of touch and hearing.

6

Flauta na floresta —
o vento sopra nos furos
do bambu brocado.
(Beça, 2006, p. 63)

Flute blew in the woods —
the wind plays through the holes
of the drilled bamboo.

Through the holes in the flute, the wind and the sounds may allude to a specific time. The bamboo, as the element used in this poem's musical artifact, makes us think of the old, the traditional. Nevertheless, we do not need to make this move and ramble into dispersed interpretations. We may just stop at that very moment and capture that feeling of sensing the wind and listening to the sound of its

passing through the holes of insect-affected bamboo.¹ Trying to imitate the sound, the translation makes use of an assonance ("Flute blew in the woods"). Also, at the same time that it avoids word repetition, it chooses "plays" instead of "blows", not only because the wind seems to be having fun, but also because a flute is a musical instrument — meant to be played.

Another example of synesthesia, of a very recurrent image in Brazilian nature, now in Bacellar's work, can be seen in the following poem:

O brilho do salto
do peixe na cascata,
lâmina de prata.
(Bacellar, 2002, p. 50)

The flash of the jump
of the fish in the cascade,
silver blade.

This poem refers to a phenomenon called *piracema*, the migration of fishes in rivers in order to complete their reproduction cycle, which takes place between November and February in Brazil. During the *piracema*, the fishes go river up, against the flow - that is the jump of the fish in the cascade. As Bacellar opens this image to us, the sparkling fish teases our eyes and ears with their brilliant color and the frantic noise of the river water. They also resemble a turbulent group of teenagers, full of life and energy. We chose *blade* because it rhymes with *cascade* in the previous verse, keeping it close to Portuguese, with "cascata" and "prata".

Doce de carambola.
Até parece que estou
comendo estrelas.
(Bacellar, 2002, p. 99)

¹ "Broca-de-bambu" is the name of the insect that destroys bamboo by carving holes in it. That is why he writes *bambu brocado* — or, bamboo hit by "broca".

Carambola jam.
It does feel as if I were
chewing some stars.

Anyone who knows the fruit named “carambola” will surely understand why it is also called “star fruit”. It has to do essentially with its shape: when sliced, it resembles a five-pointed star. The poet is here playing with form and flavor. Also, as Paz (1983, p. 37) states, haiku is “non-intellectual art, always concrete and anti-literary, [...] it's a small capsule filled with poetry capable of making apparent reality leap away”. Stars are also an image for the following poem:

Jogando a tarrafa
caboclo desfaz a lua -
pesca estrelas de escamas.
(Beça, 2006, p. 75)

Throwing the cast net
caboclo undoes the moon -
fishes for scales stars.

8

But not all synesthetic images are pleasant. Bacellar gives us a picture of the end of the day in the central market, next to the Negro river:

Um cheiro de peixe
podre e fruta estragada.
Vento do mercado.
(Bacellar, 2002, p. 95)

A smell of rotten
fruit and putrefied fish.
Wind from the market.

As for Beça, he connects not only feelings and senses but also Eastern and Western classical references. Most of us are familiar with the fable of the cicada

and the ant. The cicada is, in Japanese, a *kigo* (a seasonal term) that refers to the summer, to hot and damp weather. It clearly relates also to the climate conditions of the Amazon, as do the ants.

A cigarra canta
o anúncio de sua morte -
formigas na contradança.
(Beça, 2006, p. 95)

The cicada sings
the announcement of its own death -
ants in contradance.

In this union of elements from nature or various symbols, Beça and Bacellar encourage the reader to sense poetry as in a spiritual exercise through the poetic forests, bundled with carefully forged words, and particular feelings that populate the imagery of Amazonian haiku.

9

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

It is impossible to present the multiplicity of meanings the Amazonian haiku packs into so few verses. In the deliberate weaving of images and words used to create semantics anchored in the vast Amazon as a literary setting, Beça and Bacellar's perception of the poetic instant in the vastness of the world of haiku is attested to.

In this peculiar universe, Japanese elements are recurrently emphasized, but, even though some of the poems could have been written in big cities like London, Rome, New York, Brussels, Paris, and São Paulo, other poems are deeply rooted in Amazonian nature, with a perspective of simplicity, pouring into poetry something that usually goes unnoticed by the reader's eyes.

These poetic productions also pay tribute to the haijin Matsuo Bashô. This expresses the importance of the Japanese haikuist in the Amazonian haiku poetry scene. The name *satori* is also very meaningful in this context. Japanese

culture is not restrained, but frequently referred to; for instance, Bacellar's poetry bears traces of Senryu poetry, as there are traces of humor in the verses, although they are not explicitly mentioned, as in Beça's poetry.

The Amazonian haiku, therefore, reveals a peculiar nature but does not fail to carry the universality of poetry. On the contrary, it intensifies the unfolding and traditional Japanese poetic genre in the face of the varied Amazonian images. We chose some of the poems written by Luiz Bacellar and Aníbal Beça, but there are many other haiku writers in the region, and the interest in this topic grows more and more each day. Our intention in translating some selected poems is to spark some interest from both outside (so that people who do not have proficiency in Portuguese can read and appreciate it) and inside (for Portuguese-speaking translators to feel encouraged to translate Amazonian haiku to other languages). Concerning literary translation, we agree that it is impossible to translate a text while keeping all the literary aspects of its origin. Following Britto (2016, p. 54), we believe that it is mandatory to evaluate all the elements and choose which peculiarities to observe, putting them in a preference order. The objective is to successfully transmit the most since it is impossible to render it all. Haiku are extremely difficult to translate not only because of their conciseness but also because it is grounded in a very different culture/literature. Anyway, despite this difference, it found admirers and poets here, spread over the five regions. Amazonian haiku is only one of many rich manifestations of this genre in Brazil.

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Enviado em: 26 de março de 2024

Aprovado em: 30 de julho de 2024

11