

# Paulo Leminski, from São Paulo Concretism to the Post-Haiku

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**Abstract:** In this essay, I examine part of the work of the Brazilian poet Paulo Leminski. From an analysis of his first poems, I define his differences from São Paulo's concrete poets and demonstrate how Leminski developed a poetic project inspired by the genre of *haikai*. The "post-haiku" allowed Leminski to articulate a tradition of formal compositional rigor and the idea of poetry as experience.

**Keywords:** Brazil, concrete poetry, haiku, experimentation, experience

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One winter afternoon in 1963, Paulo Leminski, a then-aspiring 18-year-old poet, read in the local newspaper of his hometown, Curitiba, a news article that intrigued and seduced him: an important poetry symposium was to take place in Belo Horizonte. It was the National Week of Avant-Garde Poetry, organized by the Tendência group from Minas Gerais and the Concrete Poetry Group from São Paulo. Legend has it—a legend that is now part of the collection of anecdotes of Brazilian contemporary literature—that Leminski ditched everything and left for Belo Horizonte to meet the São Paulo poets, whom he greatly admired. Carrying Ezra Pound's *ABC of Reading*, his bedside book, the young man hitched his way to Belo Horizonte, where he arrived penniless.<sup>1</sup> In the words of Haroldo de Campos, one of the members of the concrete poetry group, he appeared at the

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<sup>1</sup> Toninho Vaz, author of *O bandido que sabia latim*, a biography of Leminski, offers more details: "Leminski embarcou às 8 horas da noite num ônibus na rodoviária de Curitiba, com a previsão de chegar na manhã do dia seguinte em Belo Horizonte. Estava empolgado e apresentava em voz alta o que pretendia argumentar com os mestres. O evento literário, que não era aberto ao público, estava sendo organizado pelos poetas Affonso Ávila e Affonso Romano de Sant'anna, a quem Leminski procurou no hotel para ter sua participação garantida. Depois de explicar que estava sem dinheiro e de contar a longa aventura vivida até chegar a Belo Horizonte, ele seria liberado do pagamento da taxa de inscrição" (Vaz 68).

gathering like a “Curitiban Rimbaud.” Disheveled, anxious, bold, cocky, Leminski made his entrance into Brazilian poetry on his own terms.

From this 1963 scene, at least two elements, which are in mutual tension and which will characterize Leminski’s work, can be observed: for one, the counterculture rebel temperament, with beatnik and *marginal* traits, that will assume a pop-humorous tone. And, opposed to this element, the tendency towards discipline and literature as an intellectual, laboratory-activity, typical of concretism. During the entire decade of the 1960s, and later during the 1970s, Leminski’s poetry explored and incorporated the influence of these tensions in various ways. A tension, that supposes “an extreme mix and a diversity of referents” (Cussen), and which found a possible resolution in a poetic form that I will label “post-haiku.” A good example of this is his first successful publication in the magazine of the concrete poetry group *Invenção*.

In the presentation of his contribution, written by one of the founding members of the magazine, Leminski was characterized as a young poet, devoted to the study of languages, who had already organized a group of experimental poetry in his city and had directed a page called *Vanguardia* in a newspaper *O Estado de Paraná*, from the Paraná. Leminski indeed published in *Invenção* a series of poems in the fourth (1964) and fifth (1966) issues. These poems, however, were not concrete in an orthodox sense, and somehow anticipated what would become his future poetic project. I recover two of them below:

**HAI-CAI: HI FI:**

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Chove

Na única

Qu’houve

Cavalo com guizos

Sigo com os olhos

E me cavalizo

De espanto

Espontânea oh

Espantânea (147)

I would like to highlight in this first example the allusion to the haiku conjugated within the contemporary, the “hi-fi” or “high fidelity.” The terms *Haikai* and *hi fi* do not only function as paronomasia, but also represent the astounding encounter of two types of purity, the handcrafted purity of a haiku and that which is the product of high fidelity, which in turn evokes technical reproducibility and mass culture. In this way, the title summarizes the desire to articulate tradition and modernity, handcraft and technology. The poem, with its three stanzas of three verses each, can be described as an expanded haiku, where rain appears as a state of nature, followed by the sudden appearance of the horse and its effect on the speaker. Leminski works here with the moment of identification that produces that appearance. The poetic voice is taken by surprise (*espanto*) and by the untimely (*espontânea*). After playing with the alliteration between the first and second verse, Leminski composes a new word, “*espantânea*,” which condenses “*espanto*” and “*espontânea*.” This operation that combines affection and rhetoric condenses his poetic project. The second poem is titled “PARKER”:

PARKER  
 TEXACO  
     ESSO  
     FORD  
             ADAMS  
             FABER  
 MELHORAL  
 SONRISAL  
             RINSO  
             LEVER  
             GESSY  
 RCE  
 GE                    MOBILOIL  
                     KOLYNOS  
             ELECTRIC  
             COLGATE  
             MOTORS  
                     GENERAL  
 casas pernambucanas (150)

For this poem, Leminski makes use of several commercial brands, ranging from medicine (Melhoralto) to automobiles (General Motors), many of them easily recognizable: the toothpaste brands Colgate and Kolynos, Parker pens, and Faber pencils. There are also other more local ones, like “Casas pernambucanas,” the name of a chain of houseware stores. Leminski’s operation in this poem creates a variation: instead of working with the typographical landscape that a city normally offers (the shops’ signs, the newspapers’ fonts, among other different typographical sources), as was typical of concrete poetry at the time—Augusto de Campos’s pop-concrete series is an example—he inserts the brands into the poem. In this sense, it is important to highlight two aspects that distinguish this work from others only apparently similar: on the one hand, instead of working with typography, Leminski works with sounds, producing a kind of linguistic “readymade,” evoking how Oswald de Andrade composes his poem “Biblioteca Nacional.” On the other hand, Leminski lets this “outside,” the signifier (the “profane” world of publicity and goods) enter into the poem.<sup>2</sup> Like Augusto de Campos once pointed out to define the procedure used in Caetano Veloso’s song “Alegria, Alegria,” Leminski’s text could be defined as a “handheld poem.”<sup>3</sup> As if the poet, rather than getting lost in the typographic jungle, were wandering through the city, fascinated by the displays of mass culture, embodied in this case by the commercial “jungle.” In other words, it is by wandering that Leminski makes “life” enter the poem and draw the bow that will provide tension to his poetry. The post-haiku proposal attempts to articulate such a tension.

The Tropicalist musical movement, led by Caetano Veloso and Gilberto Gil and composed by Torquato Neto, Gal Costa, Nara Leão, Os Mutantes, Tom Zé and Rogério Duarte, among others, was another of the references that came into tension with Leminski’s concrete origins. Tropicalism or Tropicália burst into

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<sup>2</sup> In “Biblioteca Nacional” Oswald de Andrade uses book titles to compose a poem: “A Criança Abandonada / O Doutor Coppelius / Vamos com Ele / Senhorita Primavera / Código Civil Brasileiro / A arte de ganhar no bicho / O Orador Popular / O Pólo em Chamas” (Andrade 125).

<sup>3</sup> Augusto de Campos describes “Alegria” in “A explosão de Alegria” in the following way: “Da mesma forma que a excelente letra de Gilberto Gil para *Domingo no Parque*, a de Caetano Veloso tem características cinematográficas. Mas, como me observou Décio Pignatari, enquanto a letra de Gil lembra as montagens eisenstenianas, com seus *closes* e suas “fusões” (‘O sorvete é morango — é vermelho / ôi girando e a rosa — é vermelha / Oi girando, girando — é vermelha / Oi girando, girando — Olha a faca / Olha o sangue na mão — ê José / Juliana no chão — ê José / Outro corpo caído — ê José / Seu amigo João — ê José’), a de Caetano Veloso é uma ‘letra-câmara-na-mão,’ mais ao modo informal e aberto de um Godard, colhendo a realidade casual ‘por entre fotos e nomes’” (de Campos 153).

the Brazilian musical scene in 1967, launched in part by the television success of Gil and Veloso. It was a brief and intense movement that articulated, in thunderous fashion, different musical traditions—the Bossa Nova incarnated in João Gilberto—or musical trends, like the *iê-iê-iê* sang by Roberto Carlos—and unfathomably blended them with information that originated in the vanguard movements, mostly from the erudite music group made up by Julio Medaglia, Damiano Cozella and Rogério Duprat, who produced their first records.<sup>4</sup> According to Toninho Vaz’s biography, Leminski became acquainted with Tropicalism right at its origin, precisely a year after publishing his first batch of poems in the *Invenção* magazine (1966). It is worth pointing out, however, that by 1966 he was already listening to The Beatles, The Mamas and the Papas, and Donovan. Rock was a constant reference in Leminski’s life, and he wrote songs and dedicated essays to John Lennon, in addition to having translated the latter’s *In His Own Words* into Portuguese.

The contact with concrete poets and the discovery of Tropicalism and rock constitute Leminski’s literary and cultural education, or at least the hard core of an education that will accompany him for the rest of his life. These two or three movements contribute to outline his poetic project, which can be defined as a constant search for a crossing between the concrete line, defined by rigorous compositional principle and a high degree of erudition, and a vitalistic, physical line that was arising from a new young sensitivity, represented in Brazil by the irruption of Tropicalism. This combination of rigor and vitality, information and pop, constitute the poetic endeavor that will consume his whole life. In the pages to follow, I will demonstrate why the post-haiku was the chosen form to articulate such tensions.

### ***The Formula of Success: The Post-haiku***

Following the critical and commercial failure of his novel *Catatau*, on which Leminski worked from 1968 through 1975, he published four books of poems.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Gilberto Gil’s first album, *Frevo rasgado*, produced by Rogerio Duprat, was released in 1968; Caetano Veloso’s first album, *Caetano Veloso*, produced by Julio Medaglia, was released in 1967.

<sup>5</sup> The critical reception of *Catatau* was evasive; in some cases, it was described as incomprehensible. Even though Leminski later wrote another novel, *Agora que são elas* (1984), he decided for a significant period to devote all his efforts to poetry.

In 1979, he published *Quarenta clicks en Curitiba* in collaboration with the photographer Jack Pires. In 1980, he released *Polonaises* and *não fosse isso e era menos, não fosse tanto e era quase*, both self-published. Finally, in 1983 he published his first book with the commercial publishing house Brasiliense, the title of which, *Caprichos & relaxos*, sheds light on the tensions contained in his poetic project and in his attempt, whether successful or not, to find a resolution for them. In Brazilian Portuguese, *capricho* is both an impulse and something executed with care and dedication. For instance, if something is *caprichado*, it means it is well-finished; the term entails special attention to detail, mindfulness that the object, the poem in this case, is carefully thought-out. A *caprichado* poem is a poem inscribed in the meticulous tradition of concretism. Rather than choose one of its two meanings, I opt to consider both, thereby considering Leminski's intensive use of portmanteaus and paronomasias. Doing so, the *capricho* becomes a perspective that orients his poetics: an initial impulse, a desire, an intuition, a snap-shot, as well as its alternative, cared-for rendering. As can be observed, from this perspective the *capricho* contains a vital and a literary dimension. The word *relaxo* is also complex and carries a double meaning. It refers to a state of relaxation and to a burlesque attitude. The relaxation invokes, given Leminski's flirtation with Zen Buddhism, a vital disposition, an attitude that allows a specific moment to be captured. The relaxation would be, therefore, a precondition for the *capricho* to appear, the disposition to capture a moment. Its burlesque dimension is part of a constant attempt to desacralize poetry, while also implying the possibility of poeticizing everything.

One might consider these four meanings and their possible combinations as "reading instructions." Even in paratextual terms, the book is intended as a synthesis or articulation of the principles of the concrete lineage: poetry as a construction (Haroldo de Campos states this in the prologue) and Tropicalism's mass-cultural character, its search for communication, lyricism, and vitality, as suggested in a brief text written by Veloso on the back cover.

*Caprichos & relaxos* selected poems from his two previous books, *Polonaises* and *não fosse isso...*, recovered part of the visual poems Leminski had been producing during those years, the poems he had included in the concrete poets' magazine, and added a new set of titular poems. Success was immediate, the book sold out three editions in less than a year, with estimate sales of ten-thousand copies. Leminski reached a readership that perhaps no other Brazilian

poet had reached, except for, possibly, Vinicius de Moraes. It is in the context of this version of a “collected works” that we can better appreciate the “post-haiku” form.

But before we deal with the post-haiku, we must talk about the haiku. The haiku, in its purest form, often describes natural phenomena, the changing of the seasons and everyday life. Its style is characterized by being natural, simple (but not simplistic), subtle, austere, and an apparent asymmetry that suggests freedom, and with it, eternity. One of the central principles of the Japanese haiku is “compositional modesty,” which arises from the ability to suppress the poetic voice to capture a fleeting moment or epiphany. The interior nature of the lyric voice opens to an outside that usually captures a tableau of nature and the passing of time. The haiku, in a traditional sense, would be something like the capture of a singular temporality by means of a discursive notation. In Brazil, unrelated to the large Japanese colony that settled in São Paulo at the beginning of the twentieth century and who cultivated the haiku, the first native Brazilian to present it was Afrânio Peixoto (1875-1947) in 1919. This is how he defined it in the preface to his book *Trovas populares brasileiras*:

Os japoneses têm uma forma de arte elementar, mais simples que a nossa trova popular: trata-se de haiku, uma palavra que nós ocidentais não podemos traduzir, exceto com ênfase. São terços curtos, versos de cinco, sete e cinco sílabas. Nesse padrão eles inscrevem emoções, imagens, comparações, suspiros, desejos, sonhos ... de charme intraduzível (12).

But it will be the concrete poets who will reflect upon and spread the genre with consistency. Haroldo de Campos, for instance, publishes two articles, one in 1958 and another one in 1964, the first called “Haikai: homenagem à síntese,” and the second one, “Visualidade e concisão na poesia japonesa,” and both will be included in his book of essays, *A arte no horizonte do provável* (1969). Haroldo’s interest in the haiku revolves chiefly around its constructive aspect. In “Haikai: Haikai: homenagem à síntese,” he argues:

Não me parece justificada a aura de melifluidade e exotismo gratuito que a visão ocidental procura, frequentemente, emprestar

ao haicai, desvitalizando-o em sua principal riqueza—a linguagem altamente concentrada e vigorosa—para apresentá-lo como um produto arrebicado daquilo que E.P (Ezra Pound) denominou, no mesmo ABC of Reading, “rice-powder poetry,” ou seja, “poesia-pó-de-arroz” (55-6).

Haroldo de Campos’s defense of the haiku is clearly based on its formal dimension, on the rigorous work the poet has to commit in order to condensate a certain content into three lines. As indicated by the titles of his essays, Haroldo is interested in the exercise of “synthesis” and “concision,” which align the genre of haiku to the project of concrete poetry in its most orthodox phase.

In agreement with the idea of synthesis highlighted by Haroldo de Campos, Leminski asserts the following in an article titled “Bonsai. Niponização e miniaturização da poesia brasileira”: “Hai-kai é o nosso tempo, baby. Um tempo compacto, um tempo “clip,” um tempo “bip,” um tempo “chips.” Essas brevidades lembram aquelas árvores japonesas, as árvores “bonsai,” carvalhos criados dentro de vasos minúsculos, signos de seres vivos, produtos da arte e da paciência. “Hai-kai” é “bonsai” da linguagem.” (113). In this essay, he claims a certain ‘Japanization’ of Brazilian poetry, mainly highlighting the idea of montage, of portmanteaus, of miniaturization and the use of a non-discursive language. But additionally, the haiku is for Leminski the form that would enable him to capture the experience proposed, among others, by the Japanese poet Basho (1644-1694), to whom he will dedicate a biography called *Bashô, a lágrima do peixe* in 1983. There, for instance, Leminski states:

sua musa se movia tanto diante de uma árvore, um canto de cigarra, uma lua na água, como diante de uma peça nō. Ou da flauta de um guerreiro que virou pó, há muitos séculos atrás. Difícil distinguir, em pessoa tão aculturada quanto ele, os haikais de inspiração ‘natural’ dos haikais de inspiração ‘cultural’. (120)

This second way of thinking about the haiku separates him from Haroldo de Campos, who, as we have pointed out, is skeptical of “mellifluous” and “exotic” experience rendered in poetry. In order to think about the operations Leminski performs on the ways of reading the haiku, we need to make the following clear:



for the concrete poet, it is Pound who provides access and path for interpretation of the haiku, whereas, for Leminski, Reginald Horace Blyth, as well as Pound, provides a key initiation.<sup>6</sup> It is Blyth who highlights the experiential aspect of the haiku over the compositional one, thereby making him a central author for the beat generation. Blyth is cited, for instance, in Kerouac's novel *The Dharma Bums*, and has influenced Gary Snider and Allen Ginsberg, among others. Thanks to Blyth's contribution, the haiku acquires prestige in the American counterculture movement of the 1960s. Moreover, Zen masters like D.T. Suzuki or Alan Watts, the latter a mentor of Californian Buddhism during the 1960s, with whom Leminski was greatly familiar<sup>7</sup>, refer to the haiku in their writings as a particular form capable of conveying a certain state of subjectivity. Hence, it is possible to argue that from the beat generation onwards, for a certain sector of the youth culture, and certainly for Leminski, the haiku served as the poetic register of an intensified experience that, while previously associated with meditation or contemplation, could now be viewed from the perspective of the use of hallucinogenic drugs like LSD or mescaline.

We could sum up by saying that to the strict and constructive tradition of the haiku as seen by Pound and the concrete poets, Leminski adds the experiential tradition, first articulated by the Japanese masters and later revisited under the light of the counterculture movement. This compositional protocol not only separates him from the concrete poets, but also from the marginal *carioca* poets like Cacaso or Chacal, who also cultivated the brief form but were more attuned to the tradition that Oswald de Andrade had proposed in the 1920s with his "kodacs" poems. Opposed to the concrete poets, indeed critical of the intellectual character concrete poetry often adopted, brevity did not invoke any literary tradition for these poets, except Oswald de Andrade and maybe some countercultural poets like Allen Ginsberg or Lawrence Ferlinghetti. Leminski

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<sup>6</sup> Blyth wrote several works on Zen, the haiku, the *senryū* and other forms of Japanese, and more generally Asian, literature, among which stand out *Zen in English Literature and Oriental Classics* (1942), his four-volume series *Haiku* (1949-52), that reference classic haiku but also Shiki, and his two volumes of *A History of Haiku*.

<sup>7</sup> His early connection with Asia materialized through the martial arts: Leminski earned a black belt in judo. This link, though seemingly incidental, led him to Asian literature. Being a language lover, he managed to master Japanese before he turned twenty. An avid haiku reader, he had access to original sources, the complete works of Bashō, *Nipón* Haishō Taikai, for instance. For further information on the relationship between Leminski and Asian culture see Toninho Vaz's biography, *Paulo Leminski: o bandido que sabia latim*.

dedicates the following words to Basho, showing his detachment from marginal poetry and revealing his poetic project: “os pensamentos mais sutis são revelados nas condições mais materiais. E a poesia mais alta, nas circunstâncias mais pedestres” (112).

Rigor, experience, and also, accessibility traced in everyday situations. The poetry of Leminski that is permeated by the haiku becomes instantly accessible to the reader, even easy to memorize and repeat. This is one of the ways in which he shapes his evident desire to become massified: to find in everyday matters, or base on them, a synthesis that would conjugate formal strictness to then contain a high degree of existential meaning, as becomes evident in some of the haikus reproduced below:

feliz a lesma de maio  
um dia de chuva  
como presente de aniversário (318)

acabou a farra  
formigas mascam  
restos da cigarra (322)

While the haiku with orthodox metrics occupies an important place in his poetic work, Leminski leans more towards brevity and concision than to metrics per se. He invokes the haiku, its memory, praises brevity but does not follow it strictly. A “chip” or “clip” poetry in the very words of the poet. That brief poetry, that does not abide by the haiku’s compositional principle, but that nevertheless provides evidence of a work with synthesis and montage, and, that often carries poetic quotes or references to the concrete tradition, is what I call “post-haiku.” The term serves the purpose of linking this form to his more traditional haikus while separating it from the “minute poems” of the ‘marginal’ *carioca* poets. Therefore, it can be argued that the post-haiku is Leminski’s definitive poetic project. Let us consider two examples of the post-haiku:

casa com cachorro brabo  
meu anjo da guarda  
abana o rabo (*Caprichos & relaxos* 103)

entre a dívida externa  
e a dívida interna  
meu coração  
comercial  
alterna (33)

Or this other one:

en la lucha de clases  
todas las armas son buenas  
piedras  
noches  
poemas (76)

These poems are not haikus in a strict sense, yet they retain a certain kinship with the form through their brevity and their last verse both contributing in that sense. The brief form, containing both measures of humor and nonsense, make possible, in ideal terms, to dose and regulate difficulty and redundancy to obtain that connection between experimentation and experience, between construction and communication. In this sense, I would mention an additional aspect: the fact that both the haiku and the post-haiku acquire in Leminski an oral dimension. As he announces in *Caprichos & relaxos*, his texts are brief poems intended for vocalization. He imagines them in this way to reverberate as an advertising jingle, a graffiti tag, or the chorus of a Veloso song.<sup>8</sup>

### **Failure as a Way to Succeed**

The difficulties of articulation between experimentation and experience, between construction and communication can be traced to a book of letters sent by Leminski to the poet Régis Bonvicino published after Leminski's death. What

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<sup>8</sup> There are two important issues here: between 1971 and 1980, Leminski had been living from advertising work, producing ad slogans, and had also begun to work with musicians. In 1981 Veloso recorded one of Leminski's poems "Verdura," which became one of the most listened-to songs of that year.

can be seen there are clear references to the slow, hard and erratic work that Leminski dedicated to achieving such articulation, which was actually already present, as we have observed, from his very first poems. Leminski states:

Somos os últimos concretistas e os primeiros não sei o que lá  
Somos centauros  
Metade decadentes alexandrinos bizantinos  
E metade bandeirantes pioneiros Marcopulos  
Simbad  
Livingstones  
Davy Crockets

A música popular é a escola  
O cartum é a escola

Sem abdicar dos rigores de linguagem  
Precisamos meter paixão em nossas constelações  
Paixão  
PAIXÃO

El día que me quieras  
Voy por la vereda tropical  
Reloj  
No marques las horas (45)

What does this brief letter tell us? The first line introduces a note of uncertainty. The end is known, but not what follows. The second line suggests a mythical image, the centaur, an imaginary animal that is half-man, half-horse. Both the initial uncertainty and the fantastic figure that follows offer us an entrance into his poetic project. However, other suggestions appear further below. Popular music and comic books are mentioned as part of the different areas of culture from which Leminski drank. But there is something else: the word “passion,” which Leminski uses twice, the second time capitalized for emphasis. Let us remember, for starters, that one of Leminski’s biographies, the one dedicated to Trotsky is entitled *A paixão segundo a revolução*, a title that suggests an

unquestionable Christian reference. The passion is the theological term used to refer to Jesus Christ's journey and suffering in the hours prior to his crucifixion. Considering that Jesus Christ was also the subject of one of Leminski's biographies, we could assign a religious value to the "passion" mentioned here. The question that begs to be asked is, what did that passion consist of? For that purpose, its sense needs to be further refined, to be interpreted not only in the terms of suffering, but also as submission and persistence.

Passion works in the same way as persistence in a project—Christianity for Christ, the permanent communist revolution for Trotsky, and a poetry founded between two apparently opposing traditions in the case of Leminski—regardless of the risks that lie ahead. In numerous occasions, Leminski's poetry dealt with the possibility of failure, not without a dose of humor or irony:

Um dia a gente ia ser homero  
 A obra nada menos que uma Ilíada  
 Depois a barra pesando  
 Dava para ser aí um rimbaud  
 Um ungaretti um fernando pessoa qualquer  
 Um lorca um éluard um ginsberg  
 Por fim Acabamos o pequeno poeta de provincia  
 Que sempre fomos  
 Por tras de tantas máscaras  
 Que o tempo tratou como a flores. (*Caprichos & relaxos* 50)

If passion in the Christian sense refers to holding to one's convictions despite the possibility of failure, the poem cited above shows us how failure is turned into a theme. Despite his wildest ambitions—to be like a Homer, Rimbaud, Ginsberg, among others—time grants his work a much more modest place: that of a provincial poet. In this poem, the persona, resigned, attests the failure of his enterprise, yet there is no regret, nor any possible error considered. Ambition is necessary even if the end is foreseen: the impossible task of adding a fine finish to his centaur.

Consequently, if during the 1960s the young Leminski was but a *malandro* or a cultured misfit, sometimes even a model student or a *karateka*, by the 1970s he is cultured yet damned by his desire to flirt with constructing a public figure

almost like a martyr. This will be Leminski's great gambit as an author in the 1980s: to offer himself as the ceremonial sacrificial victim to enable the emergence of that "centaurian" project of being "nothing or almost an art." In this sense, a brief essay he dedicates to the reedition of Rimbaud's *A Season in Hell*, which he opens by discussing Rimbaud's marginality, proves to be revealing:

Aí vem o primeiro marginal. Vivesse hoje, Rimbaud seria músico de rock. Drogado como o guitarrista Jimi Hendrix, bissexual como Mike Jagger, dos Rolling Stones. "Na estrada," como toda uma geração de roqueiros. Nenhum poeta francês do século passado teve vida tão "contemporânea" quanto o gatão e "vidente" Arthur Rimbaud. A melhor poesia de Rimbaud esteve, porém, em seu gesto final: a recusa do sucesso, a escolha do fracasso, a derrota da literatura, inimiga da poesia, para que esta triunfasse. (99-100)

The second fragment cited above that serves as a conclusion for this brief text might seem somewhat enigmatic since, what does it really mean to say that literature is poetry's enemy? Could this be a vitalist statement? It is possible that Leminski is finally opposing what he had been trying to articulate. And yet, all his work proves contrary to this. I tend to think that such desire for failure is the modernist desire for excellence, or at least, the Mallarméan desire for excellence, the locutionary disappearance of the "I" so that only the poem's handcraft, and its experiential content remain. A good example of this can be found in the poem "Apagar-me," published in *Caprichos & relaxos*:

Apagar-me  
diluir-me  
desmanchar-me  
até que depois  
de mim  
de nós  
de tudo  
não reste mais  
que o charme (66)

The word “charme,” with its Latin origin meaning “verse,” finishes this poem published in *Caprichos & relaxes*. Patiently, almost from the very beginning, Leminski invents the figure of an author whose fate is to vanish in a martyrlike submission within a poetic project he imagined having achieved in the last years of his brief life. After reaching said “perfection,” the conjugation of two poetic traditions that were, in appearance, radically opposed, after weaving “life” and “poetry,” the only thing left for him was silence, or better yet, *charme*.

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