Leminski, Paulo. *Ensaios e anseios crípticos*. Campinas, Brasil: Editora da Unicamp, 2011. Print. 329 pp.

JIZELDA F. GALVÃO
THE GRADUATE CENTER – CUNY

To those readers acquainted with the Brazilian poet Paulo Leminski (1944-1989), his neo-baroque experimental poetic prose *Catatau* (1975), *Ensaios e anseios crípticos (Cryptical Essays and Uneasinesses*) unveils the "en-light-ened" side of this cryptic writer. A prolific poet, Leminski wrote experimental prose / essays, songs, and was also a translator. Among the many works that consecrated Leminski as one of the most outstanding names of his generation in the Brazilian fictional arena are *Caprichos e relaxos* (1983), *Distraídos venceremos* (1987), *Vida* (biografias: Cruz e Souza, Bashô, Jesus e Trótski; 1990), *La vie en close* (1991); and *O ex-estranho* (1996). Of mixed Polish and African descent himself, his curiosity for different cultures prompted him to learn several languages on his own. He knew Japanese, French, English, Latin, and Hebrew. His most noted renderings are of Alfred Jarry, James Joyce, John Fante, John Lennon, Samuel Beckett, and Yukio Mishima.

Leminski's title for this collection of essays sparks in the reader curiosity and delight. Underneath the simplicity of the three words "ensaios" (essays), "anseios" (uneasinesses, concerns), and "crípticos" (cryptic), the poet's playful nature is generating word puns. He is shaping his artistic and poetic concerns/ uneasinesses (anseios) into critical essays (ensaios críticos) through double-meanings and paronomasia. This unique collection is the result of a compilation of two volumes of essays published in 1986 and 2001, respectively, drawing for us this poet's "panorama of ideas in transformation" [o panorama de um pensamento mudando] (18). The two volumes correspond to Parts 1 and 2 of *Ensaios e anseios crípticos.* Part 1 brings in texts in which the essayist said to have gathered his basic theoretical notions. Part 2 are texts in which he focused on the analysis of works by Brecht, Rimbaud, Haroldo de Campos, Sartre, Guimarães Rosa, and Euclides da Cunha, to cite only a few. Most of the texts included in the collection first appeared in Brazilian newspapers and magazines.

In *Ensaios e anseios crípticos* Leminski's skills as a devoted laborer of the language is evidenced throughout, and exactly those skills give the reader a most enjoyable reading

experience. For those who are unacquainted with the Brazilian poetic movements, the author creates here a very informal introduction to the history of Brazilian Poetry. And those who are familiar with this writer's poetry will be quite impressed with his scholarly facet. The poet also makes issues outside poetry his business, lending to his verse a richer and greater depth. Therefore he gets into literary history, theory and criticism, cultural issues, politics, history, semiotics.

He defines this collection as his "theoretical reflection on poetry making" [o exercício da reflexão teórica sobre o fazer poético] (15). In it, the poet confesses that he is "pursued by two irreconcilable obsessions: a fixation on the idea of innovation and an anxiousness over communication [of his writing]" [duas obsessões me perseguem (que eu saiba): a fixação doentia na ideia de inovação e a (não menos doentia) angústia quanto à comunicação] (17-18). The collection is divided into two sets of prose writing, speckled with a few poems. Subtle humor, sharp arguments, and a magnificently ludic language are combined to put forth Leminski's postures on highly significant issues concerning Art in general, and poetry in particular.

The first set opens with a poem that he places underneath the heading "theoretical uneasinesses" and entitles "Invernáculo," a Leminskian word creation. An interpretation of the poet's intention in this poem is not intended here, but we hear poetry's own voice demanding a search for a new language (11). From there onward, Leminski carries us everywhere from his defense of poetry against the utilitarian state of the art ("Poetry is the last trench where art defends itself from the temptations of turning into an ornament and a merchandise" [A poesia, afinal, é a última trincheira onde a arte se defende das tentações de virar ornament e mercadoria] [46]) to an open-hearted praise of the popular singer and composer Caetano Veloso (136). Leminski tackles controversial theoretical issues (What is art? [41-50]), taking very clear postures, sometimes controversial ones- "No sex, no literary creation" [Sem sexo, neca de criação] (111), substantiated by examples from Brazilian and world literatures. The reader gains a comprehensive introduction to some of the poetic movements in Brazil, starting with the 1922 Avant-garde Movement all the way into the 1970s "Marginal Poetry" movement , Leminski's contemporaries. The writer reflects on culture, on literary theories, history, and criticism, as a comparatist, i.e., establishing the bridge between Brazilian artistic creations and the world scene (e.g., 74).

What comes across quite clearly to the reader is the critic's incessant pursuit of finding out what poetry truly is. His main target is always the same: language. As several Brazilian writers did before him, this author also laments over the fate of writing in Portuguese. "The Portuguese language is an exile" [A língua portuguesa é um desterro, um exílio, um confinamento] (161), regrets Leminski. "We are imprisoned in an insignificant language" [Estamos enclausurados numa língua insignificante] (169). To him, "[t]here is no exile that compares to the mother language's exile" [Não há exílio que se compare ao exílio do idioma natal] (193). With his comparatist's eye for the world, he sympathizes with Samuel Beckett and Kafka, who were forced to write outside their native language. To him, they are "exiled souls" [São almas exiladas] (193).

In the beginning of the first set of writings, the essayist states that "[t]o translate is to reflect: meta-language is a modality of translation" [Traduzir é refletir: metalinguagem é uma modalidade de tradução] (17). In the second set, where he mostly reflects upon the wheels and deals of translating texts, in special poetry, we come to understand his reasoning behind his choices of authors to translate. Leminski learned to write through translating. His 'paideuma' is composed of great laborers of language such as: Walt Whitman, Lewis Carroll, Bashô, James Joyce, Yuikio Mishima, John Lennon, and others. But the author seems to be a translator who is wary of translations. Serious and demanding from himself and others, for him "to translate is not to depreciate the work, no original deserves that" [traduzir não é deixar mais barato, nenhum original merece ser passado para um repertório mais baixo] (264). In many occasions, he clarifies to the reader what a translation means to him. "Every translation is an icon: it reproduces parts of an original [work]. Only documented, current information, in their natural language, is translatable literally. Icons, since they do not have synonyms, are not translatable" [Toda tradução é icônica: reproduz partes de um original. Só informações documentais eventuais, nos idiomas naturais, são traduzíveis "ao pé da letra". Ícones, não tendo sinônimos, não são traduzíveis] (298). What is Leminski getting at here? In reference to other essays within the collection, the point he is making here becomes clearer. In commenting on the complexities faced when translating two books by John Lennon (*In His Own Write* and *A Spaniard in The Works*), the translator discloses his approach towards translating. "Cases- limit, like John Lennon's prose, demand the use of a particular modality of translation. The co-creation. The trans-creation, Haroldo de Campos would say" [Casos-limite como o da prosa de Lennon forçam o emprego de uma modalidade particular

de tradução. A cocriação. A transcriação, diria Haroldo de Campos] (248). Later down the road, his demands from a translation become yet clearer. On commenting on a translation of Takuboku Ishikawa's Tankas into Portuguese by two unnamed poets, the demanding translator Leminski criticizes it as: "The respectable Brazilian translation . . ., [h]owever, is not a trans-creation. The fine weaving of the sound games that are the beauty of Ishikawa's and the Japanese poetry in general was neglected . . . And many of the ludic games with ideograms contained in the original were overlooked. [A respeitável tradução brasileira . . . [n]ão se trata, porém, de uma transcriação. Não foi recriada em português a fina tessitura de jogos sonoros que fazem a graça específica de Ishikawa e da poesia japonesa em geral . . . E passaram inadvertidos muitos jogos contidos nos ideogramas do original] (321-22). His criticism of the unnamed poets, one Brazilian, the other Japanese, reflects the importance for him of what was left out: There lies the poetry. "Poetry, in a message, is what one loses in translation. Poetry is too fragile (or too solid) to be transported without damage or irreparable losses" [Poesia, numa mensagem, é o que se perde na tradução. Poesia é uma substância frágil demais (ou sólida demais) para ser transportada sem danos ou perdas irreparáveis] (298).

Ensaios e anseios crípticos is quite unique within the history of Brazilian literature. Among Brazilian fictionists in general, and poets in particular, the versatility to discourse in fiction as well as in theory and criticism is quite rare. Among the few, an outstanding name is that of Haroldo de Campos, poet, critic and translator, a coincidence that explains Leminski's great admiration for de Campos. Despite the fact that this collection is mostly a book of essays, poetic language dominates the writing. The final product is a poetic prose rich in information where the scholar Leminski cannot conceal the poet part of himself.