

PREFACE

Eugénio de Andrade was Portugal's most popular poet at the time of his death in 2005. In the course of his career, he won all of his country's poetry awards, including the prestigious Camões Prize, as well as The European Prize for Poetry and France's Prix Jean Malrieu. Here in the United States, he is represented by eleven collections of finely-wrought verse, including *Forbidden Words: Selected Poetry of Eugénio de Andrade* from New Directions.

Eugénio's craft is to sing the Portuguese language with the simplicity of a bird. His triumph is like that of a great athlete: he makes it look easy. He makes it look natural. But the delicacy, precision, and beauty of his poetry is, like all great art, achieved through what he calls, borrowing from Leonardo da Vinci, *ostinato rigore*. That stubborn adherence to the musical rigor of words is what sets him apart from other great Portuguese poets of the 20th century. His numerous drafts, revisions, rewritings, re-listenings, are testimony to his religious dedication to the beauty of language. Eugénio was proud to have been referred to as a Pagan poet and it is clear from both his own commentaries and the internal evidence of the poems themselves that music is the yearned-for fulfillment of this man who worshipped the body, the senses, the loveliness of blossoms and the song of birds.

The beauty of his verse, however, is a hard-won victory. He is not an unconscious participant in the weave of nature's panoply. In fact, he is supremely conscious, supremely aware of the minutia involved in his daily struggle for perfection. In a poem that appears in *Labor of Patience*, a book written seven years before this one, Eugénio focuses on his eternal search: "All morning I was searching for a syllable" he says, because "Only it could shield me from/January cold, the drought/ of summer. A syllable/ A single syllable./ Salvation." In this collection, which he must have sensed would be his last, the very first poem, "To See Clearly," refers to "those burning syllables" to which he always returns. The second poem

begins with the imperative “Go syllable by syllable” and concludes with the repeated exhortation “Syllable by syllable/walk to the empty/water jug. –Now so full!” In “Winter Poem,” he balances against old age the freshness of words, “a murmur of morning syllables,” though in a later poem he recognizes the almost desperate nature of the poetic impulse, speaking of “hoarse syllables/moist with desire.” Finally, in a “Simple Thought,” he calls those carefully gathered syllables by their rightful name, when he says “It is music....It will stay with you the rest of your days.” Clearly, Eugénio would embrace Walter Pater’s claim that “all art constantly aspires towards the condition of music.” In our struggle for meaning, for existence itself, it is clear that Eugénio banks on the music of his language for his salvation.

Though he builds his nest and monument of words and syllables, Eugénio is clearly delighted by the rewards that come to us through our five senses. The poetry, after all, must spring from life and the four elements that sustain it. As he says in a short poem called “The Fruit”:

This is how I want the poem to be:
trembling with light, coarse with earth,
murmuring with waters and with wind.

In this last collection alone, notice the delicate intrusion of the senses. For touch there is “the she-goat/its muzzle moist with dew.” Or “doves trembling in heat” or “a few drops of rain on someone’s hair.” For smell, there is “the scent/of wisteria dripping from the wall” or “a body...that smelled/ of ripe apples”. For sound, as already noted, we have the “murmur of morning syllables” or the sun which “sings as it burns.” For sight we have “trembling furrows in black earth.” And for taste, we have the stunning conclusion of his “Last Song”: “give me thirst itself to drink.”

Eugénio loved the natural world and the senses through which it penetrates to our core. He also loved the *élan vital* of his own blood and being. Approaching the end, he is not resigned. He speaks of “the

cadences of the heart/stubbornly repeating that it’s not grown old.” In another poem he begs “Give me another summer.” In a poem dedicated to Rilke he speaks of “the intimate flame of a fire/that refuses to go out.” But in the end, he ruefully stares reality in the face: “You will leave the house unfinished.” Indeed, we have no other choice.

This book is Eugénio’s last testament. It testifies to his love of life, both around him and within. It testifies to his enduring love of language and of music. The deepest eros of this man, this poet, beyond the desires of the body and the sensuality of nature, springs forth in his lifelong dedication to the sound of words. It is the eternal eros of the music of his song.

—Alexis Levitin
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Eugénio de Andrade

OS SULCOS DA SEDE

Eugénio de Andrade

FURROWS OF THIRST

Translated by
Alexis Levitin

Morro perto da fonte à míngua de água

—Villon

I die of thirst beside the fountain...

—Villon

VER CLARO

Toda a poesia é luminosa, até
a mais obscura.
O leitor é que tem às vezes,
em lugar de sol, nevoeiro dentro de si.
E o nevoeiro nunca deixa ver claro.
Se regressar
outra vez e outra vez
e outra vez
a essas sílabas acesas
ficará cego de tanta claridade.
Abençoado seja se lá chegar.

TO SEE CLEARLY

All poetry is luminous, even
the most obscure.
It is the reader who, at times,
instead of sun, has fog within.
And fog never let's one see clearly.
If he returns
again and again
and again
to those burning syllables
he will go blind from such clarity.
Blessed be he, if he gets there.

À BOCA DO CÂNTARO

Caminha sílaba a sílaba
como a fonte
que só pára à boca do cântaro.
Aí consente partilhar a água.
À audácia dos jovens, à timidez
dos que já o não são, mata a sede.
Aos que tropeçam na falta
de amor, aos que mordem as lágrimas
em segredo, dá a beber.
Leva aos lábios febris
a frescura da pedra. Não deixes
o medo multiplicar as garras.
Sílaba a sílaba
caminha até ao cântaro
vazio. —Tão cheio agora!

AT THE MOUTH OF THE WATER JUG

Walk syllable by syllable
like the spring
that only stops at the mouth of the water jug.
There agree to share the water.
The audacity of the young, the timidity
of those who no longer are, quench their thirst.
To those who stumble over the absence
of love, to those who gnaw tears
in secret, give drink.
Lift to feverish lips
the freshness of stone. Don't let
fear multiply its claws.
Syllable by syllable
walk to the empty
water jug. —Now so full!

AOS JACARANDÁS DE LISBOA

São eles que anunciam o verão.
Não sei doutra glória, doutro
paraíso: à sua entrada os jacarandás
estão em flor, um de cada lado.
E um sorriso, tranquila morada,
à minha espera.
O espaço a toda a roda
multiplica os seus espelhos, abre
varandas para o mar.
É como nos sonhos mais pueris:
posso voar quase rente
às nuvens altas—irmão dos pássaros —,
perder-me no ar.

TO THE JACARANDAS OF LISBON

It is they who announce the summer.
I know no other glory, no other
paradise: at its entrance the jacarandas
are in blossom, one on either side.
And a smile, peaceful dwelling,
awaits me.
Space all around
multiplies its mirrors, opens
balconies to the sea.
As in our dreams of infancy:
I can fly almost brushing
the highest clouds—brother to the birds—
losing myself in the air.

A CABRA

Uma cabra vinda de muito longe;
o focinho orvalhado, nos galhos
a primavera suspensa.
Uma cabra vem vindo devagar
do crepúsculo matinal dos dias
tecidos de amor:
amor de mulheres fechadas no quente
da sua respiração,
amor de homens que se torcem
e retorcem ao sol a prumo do desejo.
Uma cabra. Pisando a relva
ou a neve.
Como quem não quer separar-se
de tão amarga substância do tempo.

THE GOAT

A she-goat come from far away;
its muzzle moist with dew, springtime
hanging from its horns.
A goat is coming slowly coming
from the morning twilight of days
woven from love:
the love of women enclosed in the warmth
of their breath,
the love of men who thrash
and flail beneath the vertical sun of desire.
A she-goat. Treading down the grass
or snow.
Like one who does not want to leave behind
the bitter substance of time.

SCHUMANN POR HOROWITZ

São herança camponesa, as mãos.
Estas pequenas mãos, de geração
em geração, vêm de muito longe:
amassaram a cal, abriram sulcos
frementes na terra negra, semearam
e colheram, ordenharam cabras,
pegaram em forquilhas para limpar
currais: de sol a sol nenhum
trabalho lhes foi alheio.
Agora são assim: frágeis, delicadas,
nascidas para dar corpo a sons
que, noutras épocas, outras mãos
se obstinaram em escrever como
se escrevessem a própria vida.
Ao vê-las, ninguém diria que
a terra corria no seu sangue.
São mãos envelhecidas, mas no teclado
são capazes do inacreditável: juntar
nos mesmos compassos o rumor
dos bosques em setembro e os risos
infantis a caminho do mar.

SCHUMANN BY HOROWITZ

They are a peasant legacy, the hands.
These little hands, generation
after generation, come from far away:
they mixed mortar, opened trembling
furrows in black earth, sowed seed
and harvested, milked goats,
grabbed hold of pitchforks to clean out
stalls: from sun to sun no
work was alien to them.
Now this is how they are: fragile, delicate,
born to give body to sounds
which, in other epochs, other hands
persevered in writing as if
writing life itself.
Seeing them, no one would say
the earth flows in their blood.
They are aged hands, but on the keyboard
they are capable of the unbelievable: joining
in the same measure the murmur
of September woods and the laughter
of children on their way to the sea.