



EUGÉNIO DE ANDRADE

(Portugal, 1923–2005)

[October 2004]

Eugénio de Andrade (the pseudonym of José Fontinhas) was arguably Portugal’s best-known poet, translated into well over twenty languages. He adopted this pseudonym after a brief writing career under his true name. De Andrade won all of Portugal’s major literary awards: the prestigious Camões Prize, France’s Prix Jean Malrieu (1989), and the 1996 European Prize for Poetry. Marguerite Yourcenar has referred to “the well-tempered clavier” of his poems, and Spanish critic and poet Ángel Crespo has written that “his voice was born to baptize the world.”

De Andrade was often associated with the generation of '27 in Spain: Luis Cernuda, Vicente Aleixandre, and particularly García Lorca, whom he translated in his youth. Though he distanced himself from an early attachment to Rilke, his love of the poetry of Greek antiquity remained intact, as well as his affinity for Chinese and Japanese poetry (especially Tu Fu and Bashô) and the French symbolists (especially Rimbaud). Amongst Americans, Walt Whitman was his poetic and even spiritual hero. Of earlier antecedents, he felt a vital connection to San Juan de la Cruz and to Vergil.

Eugénio de Andrade’s poetry has always exhibited a carefully evoked simplicity. Through naked word and image, he strives to convey what he calls “the rough or sweet skin of things.” Distrustful of abstractions, he focuses on the world of matter, proclaiming a love for “words smooth as pebbles, rough as rye bread. Words that smell of clover and dust, loam and lemon, resin and sun.” The four classical elements of earth, water, air, and fire are never absent from his work, nor is the human body, whose sensuality and sexuality lie at the heart of *Dark Domain* (a collection which includes the poems ‘Animals,’ ‘Silence,’ and ‘Inhabited body’). For this poet, proud to be called solar and pagan, the body itself is the final “metaphor for the universe.”

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POEMS

AGAINST OBSCURITY
ANIMALS
DANCE
DESPERATE SONG
FRUIT
INHABITED BODY
PENILESS LOVERS
SILENCE
THE SYLLABLE
WORDS

Against Obscurity

The gaze lets go from ripeness.
I don't know what to do with a gaze
overflowing from a tree,
what to do with that ardour

overflowing from the mouth,
and waiting on the ground to flow back to the
source.
I don't know the destiny of light,
but whatever it may be

it is the same as that of a gaze: the same
fraternal dust,
a delayed pain gathering, the shadow,
quivering still,
of a startled skylark.

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From: *Forbidden Words*
Publisher: New Directions, New York, 2003

Contra a Obscuridade

O olhar desprende-se, cai de maduro.
Não sei que fazer de um olhar
que sobeja na árvore,
que fazer desse ardor

que sobra na boca,
no chão aguarda subir à nascente.
Não sei que destino é o da luz,
mas seja qual for

é o mesmo do olhar: há nele
uma poeira fraterna,
uma dor retardada, alguma sombra
fremente ainda
de calhandra assustada.

© 1988, Eugénio de Andrade
From: *Contra a Obscuridade*
Publisher: Fundação Eugénio de Andrade, Oporto

Animals

Far off I see my docile animals.
They are tall and their manes are burning.
They run, searching for a spring,
and sniff the purple among broken rushes.

Slowly they drink the very shade.
Now and then they lift their heads.
They gaze in profile, happy almost
at the lightness of the air.

They place their muzzles close beside your
loins,
where the body's grass is most confused,
and like a creature basking in the sun,
slowly they breathe, soothed and calm.

© Translation: 1985, Alexis Levitin
From: *Inhabited Heart*
Publisher: Perivale Press, Los Angeles, 1985

Dance

They are lithesome, full of grace.
Ferocious, too,
like a bunch of burning rooftop cats.

They are young and they are dancing – as
beautiful
as dunes, wheat, mustangs.

© Translation: 2003, Alexis Levitin
From: *Forbidden Words*
Publisher: New Directions, New York, 2003

Os animais

Vejo ao longe os meus dóceis animais.
São altos e as suas crinas ardem.
Correm a procurar a tua boca,
a púrpura farejam entre juncos quebrados.

A própria sombra bebem devagar.
De vez em quando erguem a cabeça.
Olham de perfil, quase felizes
de ser tão leve o ar.

Encostam o focinho perto dos teus flancos,
onde a erva do corpo é mais confusa,
e como quem se aquece ao lume
respiram lentamente, apaziguados.

© 1971, Eugénio de Andrade
From: *Obscuro Domínio*
Publisher: Limiar, Oporto

Dança

Eram a delicadeza, a graça.
Mas também a fúria
da gataria ardendo nos telhados.

São jovens e dançam – formosos
como as dunas, os trigos, os cavalos.

© 1997, Eugénio de Andrade
From: *Pequeno Formato*
Publisher: Fundação Eugénio de Andrade, Oporto

Desperate Song

Not even eyes know what to say
to this rose of joy
open in my hands
or in the tresses of the day.

What I dreamt is simply this,
merely water, purple with cold.
Within this grief no rose can fit.
Give me the shadow of a ship.

© Translation: 2003, Alexis Levitin
From: *Forbidden Words*
Publisher: New Directions,
New York, 2003, 0-8112-1523-7

Fruit

Peaches, pears, oranges,
strawberries, cherries, figs,
apples, melon, honey dew,
oh, music of my senses,
pure pleasure of the tongue;
let me speak now
of fruit that fascinate,
with the flavour, with the hues,
with the fragrance of their syllables:
oh tangerine, oh tangerine.

© Translation: 2003, Alexis Levitin
From: *Forbidden Words*
Publisher: New Directions, New York, 2003

Canção desesperada

Nem os olhos sabem que dizer
a esta rosa de alegria,
aberta nas minhas mãos
ou nos cabelos do dia.

O que sonhei é só água:
água ou só rumor do frio.
Nenhuma rosa cabe nesta mágoa.
Dai-me a sombra de um navio!

© 1956, Eugénio de Andrade
From: *Até Amanhã*
Publisher: Limiar, Oporto, 1956

Frutos

Pêssegos, peras, laranjas,
morangos, cerejas, figos,
maçãs, melão, melancia,
ó música de meus sentidos,
pura delícia da língua;
deixai-me agora falar
do fruto que me fascina,
pelo sabor, pela cor,
pelo aroma das sílabas:
tangerina, tangerina.

© 1997, Eugénio de Andrade
From: *Pequeno Formato*
Publisher: Fundação Eugénio de Andrade, Oporto

Inhabited Body

Body on a horizon of water,
body open
to the slow intoxication of fingers,
body defended
by the splendour of apples,
surrendered hill by hill,
body lovingly made moist
by the tongue's pliant sun.

Body with the taste of cropped grass
in a secret garden,
body where I am at home,
body where I lie down
to suck up silence,
to hear
the murmur of blades of grain,
to breathe
the deep dark sweetness of the bramble bush.

Body of a thousand mouths,
all tawny with joy,
all ready to sip,
ready to bite till a scream
bursts from the bowels
and mounts to the towers
and pleads for a dagger.
Body for surrendering to tears.
Body ripe for death.

Body for imbibing to the end –
my ocean, brief
and white,
my secret vessel,
my propitious wind,
my errant, unknown,
endless navigation.

© Translation: 1985, Alexis Levitin
From: *Inhabited Heart*
Publisher: Perivale Press, Los Angeles,
1985, 0-912288-24-8

Corpo habitado

Corpo num horizonte de água,
corpo aberto
à lenta embriaguez dos dedos,
corpo defendido
pelo fulgor das maçãs,
rendido de colina em colina,
corpo amorosamente humedecido
pelo sol dócil da língua.

Corpo com gosto a erva rasa
de secreto jardim,
corpo onde entro em casa,
corpo onde me deito
para sugar o silêncio,
ouvir
o rumo das espigas,
respirar
a doçura escuríssima das silvas.

Corpo de mil bocas,
e todas fulvas de alegria,
todas para sorver,
todas para morder até que um grito
irrompa das entranhas,
e suba às torres,
e suplique um punhal.
Corpo para entregar às lágrimas.
Corpo para morrer.

Corpo para beber até ao fim –
meu oceano breve
e branco,
minha secreta embarcação
meu vento favorável,
minha vária, sempre incerta
navegação.

© 1971, Eugénio de Andrade
From: *Obscuro Domínio*
Publisher: Limiar, Oporto, 1971

Penniless Lovers

They had faces open to whoever passed.
They had legends and myths
and a chill in the heart.
They had gardens where the moon strolled
hand in hand with the water.
They had an angel of stone for a brother.

They had like everyone
the miracle of every day
dripping from the roofs;
and golden eyes
glowing with a wilderness of dreams.

They were hungry and thirsty like animals,
and there was silence
around their steps.
But at every gesture they made,
a bird was born from their fingers
and, dazzled, vanished into space.

© Translation: 1985, Alexis Levitin
From: *Inhabited Heart: The Selected Poems*
Publisher: Perivale Press, Los Angeles, 1985, 0-912288-24-8

Silence

When tenderness
seems tired at last of its offices

and sleep, that most uncertain vessel,
still delays,

when blue bursts from
your eyes

Os amantes sem dinheiro

Tinham o rosto aberto a quem passava.
Tinham lendas e mitos
e frio no coração.
Tinham jardins onde a lua passeava
de mãos dadas com a água
d um anjo de pedra por irmão.

Tinham como toda a gente
o milagre de cada dia
escorrendo pelos telhados,
e olhos de ouro
onde ardiam
os sonhos mais tresmalhados.

Tinham fome e sede como os bichos,
e silêncio
à roda dos seus passos.
Mas a cada gesto que faziam
um pássaro nascia dos seus dedos
e deslumbrado penetrava nos espaços.

© 1950, Eugénio de Andrade
From: *Os Amantes sem Dinheiro*
Publisher: Fundação Eugénio de Andrade,
Oporto, 1993

O Silêncio

Quando a ternura
parece já do seu ofício fatigada,

e o sono, a mais incerta barca,
inda demora,

quando azuis irrompem
os teus olhos

and searches
mine for steady seamanship,

then it is I speak to you of words
desolate, derelict,

transfixed by silence.

© Translation: 1985, Alexis Levitin
From: *Inhabited Heart*
Publisher: Perivale Press, Los Angeles, 1985

e procuram
nos meus navegação segura,

é que eu te falo das palavras
desamparadas e desertas,

pelo silêncio fascinadas.

© 1971, Eugénio de Andrade
From: *Obscuro Domínio*
Publisher: Limiar, Oporto

The Syllable

All morning I was searching for a syllable.
It's very little, that's for sure: a vowel,
a consonant, practically nothing.
But I feel its absence. Only I know
how much I miss it.
That's why I searched for it so stubbornly.
Only it could shield me from
January cold, the drought
of summer. A syllable.
A single syllable.
Salvation.

© Translation: 2003, Alexis Levitin
From: *Forbidden Words*
Publisher: New Directions, New York, 2003

A Sílaba

Toda a manhã procurei uma sílaba.
É pouca coisa, é certo: uma vogal,
uma consoante, quase nada.
Mas faz-me falta. Só eu sei
a falta que me faz,
Por isso a procurava com obstinação.
Só ela me podia defender
do frio de janeiro, da estiagem
do verão. Uma sílaba.
Uma única sílaba.
A salvação.

© 1997, Eugénio de Andrade
From: *Pequeno Formato*
Publisher: Fundação Eugénio de Andrade, Oporto

Words

They are like a crystal,
words.
Some a dagger,
some a blaze.
Others,
merely dew.

Secret they come, full of memory.
Insecurely they sail:
cockleboats or kisses,
the waters trembling.

Abandoned, innocent,
weightless.
They are woven of light.
They are the night.
And even pallid
they recall green paradise.

Who hears them? Who
gathers them, thus,
cruel, shapeless,
in their pure shells?

© Translation: 1985, Alexis Levitin

As Palavras

São como um cristal,
as palavras.
Algumas, um punhal,
um incêndio.
Outras,
orvalho apenas.

Secretas vêm, cheias de memória.
Inseguras navegam:
barcos ou beijos,
as águas estremecem.

Desamparadas, inocentes,
leves.
Tecidas são de luz
e são a noite.
E mesmo pálidas
verdes paraísos lembram ainda.

Quem as escuta? Quem
as recolhe, assim,
cruéis, desfeitas,
nas suas conchas puras?

© 1958, Eugénio de Andrade
From: *Coração do Dia*
Publisher: Limiar, Oporto, 1958

ARTICLES

Eugénio de Andrade: A Translator's View

January 18, 2006

Music is the central concern of Andrade's poetry, discovered his translator Alexis Levitin after he "had learned the most essential lesson for a translator of poetry – to listen." Andrade, he finds, "has consciously intensified his focus on language and its sensual music, the pleasure that flows from within towards the outside world."

"All art constantly aspires towards the condition of music."
Walter Pater

Eugénio de Andrade is Portugal's best-known and best-loved living poet. He has won all of his country's literary honors, including the Portuguese language's most prestigious award, the Camões Prize. He has also won major awards from Brazil, Yugoslavia, Romania, France, and Spain. His first book, *Hands and Fruit*, is now in its twenty-first edition. Whenever a new collection of his poetry appears in Portugal, the first printing sells out within a few weeks.

The secret of Eugénio's extraordinary appeal lies, I think, in his apparent simplicity. Though highly cultured, Eugénio avoids bookishness and intellectualization. His foremost allegiance is to the earth, to the tangible world of the senses, to what he calls "the rough or sweet skin of things." He was born in 1923 in the small village of Póvoa de Atalaia, close to the Spanish border. Till the age of nine, he lived alone with his adored mother in relative poverty, taking solace from the goats, sheep, birds, and cicadas of the surrounding countryside. These creatures, along with poplars, mulberries, sunflowers, and grassy fields beneath a hot sun, reappear throughout his poetry. They embody the eloquent simplicity at the core of the poet's vision and voice. Always distrustful of abstractions, he proclaims his love for "words smooth as pebbles, rough as rye bread. Words that smell of clover and dust, loam and lemon, resin and sun." He is happy to say, like the American poet William Carlos Williams: "No ideas but in things."

When I first began to read Eugénio's poetry, I was charmed by the imagery, but the greatness eluded me. Something seemed missing from the printed page. But later, as we worked together, a new awareness began to dawn on me. Often, when I inquired why he had chosen one word rather than another, he would seek in vain for a rational explanation. After various false starts, he would come to a halt, stare at the text, read it aloud, and then exclaim: "Because it sounds better!" After this happened several times, we both realized that the questions I had been asking had been irrelevant.

From that time onwards, our collaboration changed. I would arrive, he would give me a snack and a cold drink, we would both admire the svelte cat insinuating himself throughout our papers, and then Eugénio would pick up the text of his poems and begin to read. He would read with great care, with utter dedication to every syllable. His left hand held the book, his right moved through the air, like that of a conductor drawing forth music. And I would watch him and listen, absorbing the movement and melody of his language.

At times he would take a pencil and draw lines from vowel to vowel, consonant to consonant, till the entire poem was crisscrossed by a thick web of connections. And I came to understand that my real task was to translate his voice into another tongue. Images would take care of themselves. My dedication had to be to sound itself. For in Eugénio's poetry, more than any other I can think of, the sound is the sense. I had intuitively been attentive to sound all along, but now I was consciously aware that music had to be my central concern. This discovery changed how Eugénio and I worked together. It stripped away unnecessary complexities, a tangle of inessentials. I had learned for myself why Marguerite Yourcenar had referred to "the well-tempered clavier" of Eugénio's poems and why the Portuguese critic Oscar Lopes had called his study of Eugénio de Andrade's poetry *A Kind of Music*.

The conviction that I was a translator of a voice deepened during our six-week reading tour of The United States and Canada in 1989. From California to the Northeast, I had the recurring experience of an intimate confrontation with the living creature that is his poetry. Always he would read first. A serious man of diminutive and fine proportions, he would stride to the podium, often reject the microphone and simply confront the audience with his naked, powerful voice. In New York, at Barnard College's Sixth International Conference on Translation, as Eugénio finished reciting his

last poem, the organizer, Serge Gavronsky, leaped to his feet and exclaimed “Fantastique! Fantastique! Et quelle voix!” And after each poem, I would have to follow that voice with my own. But as the tour went on, the echo of my translations grew closer and closer to the resonance of the original. Finally, towards the end of our tour, at the New York State Writer’s Institute in Albany, as we finished one of our best readings, Eugénio leaned towards me on the stage and whispered: “If you continue to read like that, pretty soon you will sound like Eugénio de Andrade.” What more could I have hoped for? I had learned the most essential lesson for a translator of poetry – to listen.

But what about content? Clearly nature is central to Eugénio de Andrade’s poetry. The four classical elements of earth, water, air, and fire permeate his poems, and he is pleased when critics find his work Hellenistic or pagan. His attachment to the fundamentals of the classical vision of life is made overt in a poem such as “The Fruit,” where he declares:

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

Yet, as it was for the ancient Greeks, the human body is as precious to the poet as the world around him, for he sees it as a “metaphor for the universe.” It receives the caresses of the sun, but it also produces its own inner flame of desire. During our American reading tour, Eugénio described himself in fiercely affirmative terms as a man who “says YES to life, YES to the body, YES to all experience!” Speaking of de Andrade’s poetic vision, the late Portuguese poet and critic Luis Miguel Nava discerned three essential strands, when he observed that “nature, the body, and the word meet on the same plane and in some way intermingle or merge.”

It is not surprising to discover that in Eugénio’s poetry the tongue, the lips, and especially the mouth are recurring images of the body’s sensuality. For it is through the mouth that the sweet fruit of the ambient world is taken in, and it is through the mouth that the poet’s gift of words is given back to life. Although a passionate attachment to the things of this world and the joys of the senses gives vigor to all of Eugénio’s work, in the last decade he has consciously intensified his focus on language and its sensual music, the pleasure that flows from within towards the outside world. This love of “language received lip to lip; kiss or syllable,” is as erotic for him as any love of the flesh. He is a man who loves “The pulsing of syllables”, and he often feels that his lifelong task has been a search for just a syllable, “a single syllable./Salvation.” His deep allegiance to words is reaffirmed in a recent poem in which he declares that they “are my home, salt of my tongue.”

The abiding eros, then, for this poet of desire, the body, and nature, is the eros of language. The heart of his genius is woven into the delicate, minutely wrought balance of sound in his words. *Le mot juste* is not enough. Each syllable must find its place, its fit. This musical apotheosis lies in the Portuguese, of course. But during my twenty-five years as Eugénio de Andrade’s English translator, my greatest challenge—and greatest joy—has been the effort to reproduce, in our rough and elegant tongue descended from Angles, Saxons, and Normans, a musical response as kin to the song of his words as possible.

This is a slightly adapted version of the Translator’s Introduction to *Forbidden Words: Selected Poetry of Eugénio de Andrade* (New York: New Directions, 2003).

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