

VÃO OU VAZIO

EMPTY

i

They're both at this point just words  
in a worn book, modifiers, descriptors,  
adjectives with nothing—or everything—  
to attach to. *Vão ou vazio*, which to choose?  
Empty, vain, fruitless, unavailing, futile?  
Or empty, void, bare, vacuous, unoccupied?  
There's an openness to *vazio*,  
a hint of commitment, however minimal,  
to this language that swaddles almost all words  
in *vogais*, vowels—words that in English  
we prefer to bring, like *as vogais*, to a tidy close:  
froo-**strah**-doo (*frustrado*), frustrated,  
**free**-voh-loo (*frívolo*), frivolous,  
in-**ooh**-tee-oo (*inútil*), useless,  
ee-hay-**ow** (*irreal*), unreal  
o **heep**-ee **hoh**-pee, hip hop  
o **hoh**-kee an **hoh**-lee, rock and roll.

ii

How *vão* the simple sound: Hello.  
But we miss it every day. We start,  
then close our mouths around it, for  
this is a culture that saves its smiles  
for those they already know. Even so,  
we feel at home somehow, *nossos motivos*,  
our motives for coming here still intact,  
but we, ourselves, *revirados*,  
changed in ways we can't name.  
We're the same and estranged,  
stuffed to the gills with new words, old  
desires, *os desejos velhos*. So we *descompomos*, muddle,  
past and future, *a íntegra*, the whole, with our will,  
*tão vão*, so empty, refulgent, still.