The Selected Poems of Eduardo Milán
Also by Eduardo Milán:

*La vida mantis*, Mexico City, 1993.
*Nivel medio verdadero de las aguas que se besan*, Madrid, 1994.
*Algo bello que nosotros conservamos*, Mexico City, 1995.
*Son de mi padre*, Mexico City, 1996.
*Unas palabras sobre el tema*, Mexico City, 2005.
*Papeles de la casa*, Mexico City, 2005.
*Acción que en un momento creí gracia*, Tarragona, 2005.
*Por momentos la palabra entera*, Santa Cruz de Tenerife, 2005.
*Dicho sea de paso*, Mexico City, 2008.
*Disenso*, Mexico City, 2010.
Selected Poems

Eduardo Milán

Edited by Antonio Ochoa

Translated by
Patrick Madden & Steven Stewart

and by
John Oliver Simon

Shearsman Books
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INTRODUCTION

The poetry of Eduardo Milán demarcates territories. It is a frontier, the
marker itself where the inner space of experience and the world meet.
There is a distance between the world and life lived, language serves to
keep them separated, but united at the same time. This proximity allows
Milán’s poetry to explore both adjacent territories: the inner world of
his past and his imagination, and the social and political realities of the
present time. Even when writing about the past, he holds his ground
in the now of the present. Milán’s poetry involves numerous thematic
and conceptual planes, from the personal, through social and historical
situations, to a mythic-symbolic dimension. These different planes
are unified in the poems, a crossing of planes converging in language.
His poems are grounded in the reality that he lives, and in part are a
manifestation of the action of writing upon reality, and reality upon
writing. These boundaries are adaptable. His life changes as he writes,
and in its turn life changes what he writes. His pen flows with the rhythm
of his thought, and he cuts the line faithful to his internal music, an
interiority distilled onto the page conscious of its own existence as a
concentration of language, as a work of the imagination.

The acknowledgement of an absence—as mythical as that of
Eurydice, Orpheus’s wife, or as real as that of Milán’s own mother—
seems to underpin both Milán’s poetic writing and his reading. This
seems to me one of the reasons for his frequent use of meta-language.
This self-awareness does not speak to the void directly, but speaks of
a self-awareness in the face of it. This juncture in which the void is
acknowledged is the poet’s experience with language: language cannot
name the void directly, and therefore the poem has to approximate it over
and over again. This is why Milán feels close to the mystical poetry of
Saint John of the Cross. But the need for this reiteration is also the result
of contamination. The boundaries that I spoke of are also the territories
of commerce and influence. For Milán language is not pure, there isn’t a
poetic language somewhere out there, metaphysical and permanent that
he sometimes accesses in moments of inspiration. Poems are written with
the same language with which we handle our everyday transactions. In
the poetic genealogy of Eduardo Milán we find Nicanor Parra, whose
anti-poetry does not pretend to reveal a transcendent truth but rather
challenges the preconceptions of language in our daily lives. In this way,
Parra is looking for a more honest relationship with ourselves and with
the world. As for Parra, for Milán language is accepted as imperfect. This is why a poet should be very careful about the way in which he uses words, not out of a quest for beauty, but out of responsibility. Such is the ethical stance that he cannot avoid, it is his responsibility to write with full consciousness of his actions, for his poems are actions that link words and things, the individual and the world. There is a demand for reality here, for the recognition of what is real. For Milán a poem is an event with far-reaching consequences. This is what he understands is needed from him as a Latin American poet in the twenty-first century. It is to try to go beyond oneself and place the poem within the fabric of the world, not just as any other object, but as a marker into which converge the different territories of life.

Eduardo Milán was born in 1952 in Rivera, Uruguay, a small city that shares a street with the city of Santana do Livramento in Brazil. He lost his Brazilian mother when he was only a year and a half old. As a teenager his father sent him to live in the countryside, an experience that transformed the shy boy into a confident young man. During the repressive military dictatorship of the 1970s and 80s his father was arrested for his involvement in the national resistance movement known as the Tupamaros. He was given a twenty-four year prison sentence. The name of the prison where he was sent was Libertad (Freedom). After living in fear for several years following his father’s arrest, Milán went into exile in Mexico in 1979 where he still lives, in a white house with a fig tree in the garden. From the late ’80s to the early ’90s he wrote a column on contemporary Latin American poetry for the journal Vuelta, which was directed by Octavio Paz. In 1997 he was awarded one of the most prestigious poetry awards in Mexico, the Aguascalientes prize, for his book of poems Alegria.
A brief note on the selection

Eduardo Milán is a prolific poet and essayist with over 30 books published. The translations used in this selection were taken from the work of Patrick Madden, Steven Stewart, and John Oliver Simon. Patrick and Steven have concentrated their work on Eduardo Milán’s poems from the 1980s up to 2003. John Oliver Simon has translated several books from 2000 to the present. I followed this chronological division for the translations included here. I wish to express to them my gratitude for allowing me to use their work here. The selection was a difficult process; many great poems were left out. I hope that this book serves as an incentive to publish complete books of Eduardo Milán’s work.

ANTONIO OCHOA
Cambridge, MA
Summer 2011
Poemas 1985–2003
Poems 1985–2003

Translated by
Patrick Madden and Steven Stewart
To say there is a difficult flower
to say there is to paint everything in bird
to say there is to be drawn
to the raspy word
thistle
and to the cardinal cardinal
to say there is to say it all again
beginning with the horse:
the horse is alone
now it is alone
there is no dark now
there is no silent now
there is no word now
there is no against-the-wall now:
the horse is alone which is to say it is black
it jumped over the purest
white reality

the horse is there
it flees
through the cracks in the day
fluorescence
like the moon flowing

the horse jumps over its shadow
it jumps over its silence
it jumps over its reality
it jumps over
a universe still black
before the sum
before the summit
of colors:
green mountain over blue sky
the horse’s silhouette is red
red from the hidden sun
now it hides
now it buries itself in the horse
the coin of sun
there is no silent now
there is no word now
there is no horse now
To say you and I is to enter the circus
there the lion, there the circle of monkeys,
on the flank a ballerina keeping time. The air
transports autumns from one place to another, the year
has no origin. The yellow daisy
shines in two eyes. Van Gogh’s ear
falls to the pavement like the sun: an innocent
slash interrupts the trilling of a bird. This is true
in the north. It may be false in the south. In effect
(or in the flight of a cormorant), of which bird do you speak?
Of the cormorant and its lingering flight above the heavens,
which takes on a purple tone, pure in the afternoon and in the night
God only knows. But to insist on you and I at this height
in the river, in the Nile where the weavers weave, is
to unravel the skein with some scissors, to stop hearing
the tumult of sound, that underbrush.
When there’s nothing left to say, say it. Offer an absence, a lull in the conversation, a true vacuum: the flower, not the idea, is the goddess there.
With no idea to encircle you, bird. Just blinking. Royal is the most beautiful word in this kingdom in ruins, royal. The bird’s fleeting loyalty, what was: the fire of not singing. There are birds: I’ve seen a cardinal. Authentic birds: I heard it sing. I read in its red wings, the red wings of destiny, liquid flashes of coral. I heard it said in a certain circle that singing is very natural. I also heard it said that one must be royal. What is certain is that this wheel is slipping, the light is slipping through the city, light plus light is Beatrice, the name itself is an oasis among stars. Nothing quenches a thirst for intensity. And cherry may be that word made flesh between the cardinal and nothingness.
Excellent language, excellent, 
pure, resplendent white, flower: a lily. 
Birds sing in bird. Beavers 
eat in beaver. Humans 
speak in human, hand to hand, their 
voices touch in conversation. Brilliant? 
It’s said brilliant. New York is said New York. 
Language of silver is said language of silver. For 
a golden age is said for a golden age. Góngora, 
Góngora. It was time, man of Córdoba, 
it was time, man of Córdoba. 
Affliction is said easily.