FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

Only in the Meantime and Office Poems
Mario Benedetti
Harry Morales, translator
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As part of the Uruguayan generation of ’45, the author came of literary age alongside writers such as Gabriel García Márquez and Mario Vargas Llosa. Well-received in Latin America, with more than seventy-five books in every possible genre to his credit, he is best known for his prose, such as the novels *La Tregua / The Truce* and *Primavera Con Una Esquina Rota / Springtime With a Broken Corner*, which won the 1987 Amnesty International Golden Flame prize.

This new volume, a translation of two collections of poetry, offers an interesting new voice at its beginning, with the benefit of not having to wait for the subsequent oeuvre to develop. Written between 1948 and 1956, these were Benedetti’s first published poetry collections. According to *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, Benedetti’s generation “felt the urgency of doing away with the dated rhetoric of the avant garde […] and [engaged] in a passionately critical consideration of literary language.” This is evidenced by a tone that is direct and conversational and a poetics that strikingly evolves even in this brief span from brooding and emotional to provocative, close social examination.

Only in the Meantime is full of longing for a sense of place and self, for a belief in God and the presence of the beloved. In “Nocturnal,” a poem in part about insomnia, he writes: “I’m alone with my infancy of vigilance, / with my current illusions of God, and streets that inexplicably push me / towards a remote sea of fears.” The poems are dense and ruminating, organized along a path of self-discovery.

In *Office Poems*, the theme of the middle class and a political tone emerge. The poems are much more direct and wry, featuring a jaded narrator with wide-open eyes. For example, “Monday” begins: “The noble work returned / what a damn pity / that gives us our daily bread / what a damn pity / I get into the delay / untilwhenmyGod / like an old screw / like any worm.” The brief outburst condenses the speaker’s exhaustion and spite while mimicking an exhalation.

The translator, winner of the Witter Bynner Foundation for Poetry Grant for his

translations, is loyal to Bendetti. Morales has already translated several of the author's short stories to English. Strongly influenced by Jorge Luis Borges's command to his translator—"Don't write what I say, but what I mean to say," Morales leans towards interpretation. This sometimes leads to weak choices and missed chances in the translation, which is overall fairly accurate, but by no means inspired.

This is a competent introduction to an important writer in Latin America, especially so to the reader who can manage at least some Spanish. One hopes that more of this engaging and perceptive author's work will soon be available to English-speaking readers.

Naomi Millán