Celebrating
Our Translator Supreme
Edith Grossman
In the Beginning
Because I'm your mother, that's why.
The Literary Life
THE ANTIPoEZY OF NICANOR PARRA: ITS THEORY AND TECHNIQUE

Ch. Grusman

Edith Grossman

A Thesis in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy at New York University

Advisor
THE ANTIPOETRY OF NICANOR PARRA: ITS THEORY AND TECHNIQUE
The Surgery of Psychic Removal

The following autobiographical note was written by the author at our request:

I was born in Buenos Aires, very much in the year 1874. Not just then but very soon afterwards, Jorge Luis Borges started to quote me with so little difference concerning acknowledgements, that on account of the awful risk his enthusiasm exposed him to I began to be the author of his best writing. What an injunction, dear Jorge Luis, poet of "The Trick," and "General Querido Bakes his Death in a Carriage," you were the real master of that period.

Just as psychology is the science of everything we don't know about the soul, my first book concerning Nothing and Sleeping (Not All Open Eyes Meet Insomnia) contained nothing except every possible question I could think of. In compensation, I think of myself today as one who has all the answers. But this will not make my book of questions more popular. All the copies of A Newcomer's Papers were distributed free of charge, and judging by its enthusiastic reception it was a book that would have sold well, too. In it all my many texts were mixed together into a single thought, which goes right to the idea that I had planned this really pleasant way out inspired by the herbal therapy, so popular some years ago, which either killed you or cured you.

Naturally the successes I have described meant that only thirty years of silence passed before I felt the desire to write again: first, The Beginning of a Novel and then, before the audience can leave, for they tend to believe implicitly in announcements of Most Recent Productions and they must hear about this one: A Continuation of Nothing, the latest but novel (long and millennium) and the first good novel (Adrians. Buenos Aires), although they will be sold together as companion volumes, two for the price of one, they are not the Dual Novel which, according to my theory of fiction, constitutes or contains...
Confessions of an Unreconstructed Romantic

EDITH GROSSMAN

I have written only one fan letter in my life, and that was to Álvaro Mutis. This is what happened.
Confessions of an Unreconstructed Romantic

Edith Grossman

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1970s
DRUMS FOR RANCAS

MANUEL SCORZA
1980s
antipoems
new and selected

NICANOR PARRA
Edited by David Unger
The only regret I will have in dying is if it is not for love.

—Gabriel García Márquez, *Love in the Time of Cholera*
1990s
Strange Pilgrims

Gabriel García Márquez

Winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature

Translated by Edith Grossman
ALVARO MUTIS
THE ADVENTURES OF MAQROLL
FOUR NOVELLAS
TRANSLATED FROM THE SPANISH BY
EDITH GROSSMAN
NEWS OF A KIDNAPPING

GABRIEL GARCÍA MÁRQUEZ

Winner of the Nobel Prize

"Fascinating . . . Possesses all the drama and emotional resonance of García Márquez's most powerful fiction."—The New York Times
MY NIGHT WITH
MI NOCHE CON
FEDERICO GARCÍA LORCA

JAIME MANRIQUE

Translated by Edith Grossman and Eugene Ritchie
New Edition
The Last Night I Spent With You

Translated by Edith Grossman

MAYRA MONTERO
NOVEL
Beholding Windmills and Wisdom From a New Vantage

By RICHARD EDER

So many have written wisely and cogently about “Don Quixote” since it first appeared. And as they spur at this literary edifice, they suggest the mournfully counterpointed knight himself, charging his windmill and ending up under aNorwegian chisel, that before its undignified sprawl he was flung, for a moment, inspiredly aleft.

Cervantes’s great lumberlocked book of travels, through life’s dreams and the Mancha’s dust, in crisis insight and evades it. It is stuck like a pin cushion with the most piercing and varied of critical enthusiasms, and never pinned down.

Beginning the greatest of all novels (whether you cite a poll of 100 writers chosen by the Nobel Institute, or the introduction to Edith Grossman’s new translation by Harold Bloom, who submits to no polls but his own) has continued to revolve and draw up water for its readers for nearly 400 years.

Which makes any attempt to write about it both curious and odder light. Mr. Bloom all but throws up his hands after an eloquently thoughtful juggle by remarking that no critic’s account agrees with any other critic’s. Cervantes wrote “a mirror held up not to nature, but to the reader.”

So, canonically empowered, I offer my particular mirror. But before the mirror, the window. That is what a translation must be; affording a view for those unable, because handicapped, to go outdoors and join in. Their handicap is the inability to enter the original language. Ms. Grossman’s window, just installed, stands today as the most transparent flows and least impeded among more than a dozen English translations going back to the 17th century.

The Spanish of “Don Quixote” is entirely of its time. But the language has changed relatively little since then. Apart from a couple of obsolete verb forms and some grandiloquent pastiche (imitating contemporary books of chivalry), the book alternates between earthy and soaring in a fashion entirely recognizable in Spain to this day.

English has changed considerably more. Translators must pick their way between what sounds unmixed to its readers and what embeds “Don Quixote’s” voice — because the voice transmits the heartbeat — in its century. Two recent translations go overboard trying to be currently colloquial: the British one populates the Mancha with “blokes.” Such a choice uproots the book from its time and place, paradoxically depriving it of universal resonance. Translators ruminate, “To chill or not to chill.”

After two years’ work Ms. Grossman, whose translations of Gabriel García Márquez make readers wonder if they don’t speak Spanish themselves, has provided a Quixote that is agile, playful, formal and flaky.

Once in a while there are odd choices and, in the translation’s 84 pages, some occasional flagging, but what she renders splendidly is the book’s very heart. Two figures raft through Mancha and universe upon upon flows and counterflows of supple, whirlpooling and continually reversing discourse; a model — as the book has been to so many later masterpieces — for Huck and Jim’s drifting catfish-and-cornpone cosmos and particulars.

Ms. Grossman finds a way to fashion in English the sudden wry de- scents and ascents of a verbal snake and ladders — with which the knight switches from lordly to redemptive and Sancho switches the other way.

To take an example, one of my favorites, though 100 readers will have 300 others: Don Quixote, accompanied at this point by a most miscellaneous group of followers — among them two priests, a notary, a pair of lovers, a nobleman — proclaims his barber’s bowl to be a helmet. The company holds a vote and agrees. Others at the same inn are incredulous and then indignant. A terrible fight breaks out. The knight stands around apologetically: they must have all gone crazy, he reflects. Throughout, in fact, Don Quixote attracts a bevy of groupies; notably,

in the second part, a duke and duchess who treat him royally while ar-resting “adventures” to display his delusions. On one level they are making elaborate sport of him, and there is a precooked smell to some of these pages.

On a deeper level, seeking to toy with him, they are toyed with, just as readers have been ever since. (In Part 2 Don Quixote keeps meeting people who read about him in Part 1. It is metafiction, if you like it: or is it the first celebrity cult.) Reading Cervantes we keep stumbling against ourselves: Iraq, of course, when the knight frees a group of prisoners only to have them stone him. Suddenly the giants of our day shimmer in a haze of windmills.

Don Quixote yields an enchantment deeper than laughter, though laughter is part of it. He is the Pied Piper of the imagination; he draws others into his serious game. They become his plagues. When the duke’s servant washes his guest’s hands at dinner and go on, jokingly, to wash his beard, the duke demands that his own beard be washed.

“I have immortal longings in me,” Celia de Lara declared as she applied the astringent. Don Quixote stands for the immortality of the imagination, but it would have no traction if it were not set against some, intolerable people and things. They keep defeating him of course, and he proclaims the defeat an illusion.

The Spanish philosopher Miguel de Unamuno likened his knight to Jesus, more existential than biblical, though. The comparison is not main-
vitro in virtue — though the knight starts as Alonso Quijano the Good, and ends that way; and a delicate kindness keeps breaking in — but in incarnation. Windmills, lions, cudgel-wielding shepherds, the beatings, rough sleeping, the mockerys are the reality that human life confronts. Transformations do not change them, but they change the confront-
er.

Nine hundred and seventy-three pages (in Spanish). One hundred and twenty-six chapters. Samuel Johnson, who said of “Paradise Lost” that “no man ever wished it shorter” wished, Mr. Bloom tells us, that “Don Quixote” were longer. The daughter of a friend of mine, a college student, limits her reading to three chapters at a time so as to make it fast. In fact it will.

Edith Grossman
DON QUIXOTE
By Miguel de Cervantes
A new translation by Edith Grossman.
Introduction by Harold Bloom. 340 pages. Ecco. $29.95.
Ms. Grossman finds a way to fashion in English the sudden wry descents and ascents — a verbal snakes and ladders — with which the knight switches from lordly to redolently human and Sancho switches the other way.
THE CRITICS

BOOK

KNIGHT’S GAMBIT

The scaled profligacy of "Don Quixote."

BY JAMES WOOD

The windmills that Don Quixote mistakes for giants have something in common with the madeline that makes Maudie memory buds salivate: both occur occasionally early in very long books that are, in English at least, more pleasant than read. And Cervantes may resemble Proust in another way. Both are comic writers, poorly nagged in the mundane, whose fiction has too often been externalized out of existence. Miguel de Unamuno, the relentlessly idealizing Spanish philosopher, considered "Don Quixote" a "profoundly Christian epic" and the true "Spanish Bible," and correspondingly managed to write about the novel as if not a single comic episode occurred in it. W. H. Auden thought that "Don Qui- xote" was a portrait of a Christian saint, and Unamuno’s unlikely American sup- potee Harold Bloom, in his introduction to Edith Grossman’s marvelous new translation (Ecco, $29.95), remind us that "Don Quixote," though it may not be a scripture, nonetheless captures all humanity, as Shakespeare does—which sounds more like religious laurel than like secular caution.

So it is worth reminding ourselves of the gross, the worldly, the violent, and, above all, the comic in "Don Qui- xote"—worth reminding ourselves that we are permitted the odd secular guffaw while reading. If all modern fiction comes out of the Knight’s cap, one reason might be that Cervantes’s novel contains the major comic tropes, from the farcical to the delicately ironic. First, there is the comedy of egotism—"But enough about my work, what do you think of my world?" grand manner, brilliantly exploited by Tartuffe, and by Jane Austen’s Mr. Collins, who proposes to Elizabeth Bennet by listing all the ways in which he will benefit from marriage. Don Quixote is the great chivalric egotist, never more egotistical than when he appears to be most chivalrous. After he and poor Sancho Panza have suffered several adventures, including a beating by some drunks from Vizcaya and being tossed in a blander by a gorg of men, Don Quixote has the nerve to tell his servant that these are evil enchantments and so are not really happening to Sancho. "Therefore you must not give up the misadventures that befell me, for you have no part in them." This is the knight who, finding that he can’t sleep, wakens up his servant, on the principle that “It is in the nature of good adven- tures to share the griefs of their masters and to feel what they are feeling, if only for appearance’s sake.” No wonder that Sancho elsewhere defines a knight adven- turer as someone who is beaten and then finds himself emperor.

The egotist is never very good at laughing, at himself, laughable though he often is. Cervantes has a wonderfully undulating sense in which the Knight and his servant are riding in the hills and are stopped by a loud noise. Sancho Panza weeps with terror, and Don Qui- xote is moved by his tears. When they finally discover that the noise comes from “six wooden falling hammers,” pounding away in a cloth mill, Don Quixote looks at Sancho, and sees that his cheeks were puff’d out and his mouth full of laughter, clear signs that he would soon explode, and Don Qui- xote’s melancholy was not so great that he could resist laughing at the sight of Sancho, and when Sancho saw that his master had begun, the floodgates opened with such force that he had to press his sides with his fists to keep from bursting with laughter.” Don Quixote gets cross with Sancho for laughing at him, and his father with his face, complaining, “In all the books of couple it have read, which are infinite in number, I have never found any squire who talks so much with his master as you do with yours.” As so often in "Don Quixote," the reader travels, in a page or two, through different chambers of laughter: affective, ironic, satirical, harmonious.

Edith Grossman’s English sensitivity captures these shifting registers, as we move from the Knight’s ornate, sometimes torpid diction, via the narrator’s fluent and funny recognizing, to the earthy Sancho Panza and his madder music. We are fortunate to have at present three excellent translations of "Don Quixote" in addition to Grossman, there is John Rutherford’s recent version for Penguin Classics (which takes more liberties with Sancho Panza’s domestic Spanish than Grossman’s does), and Burton Raffel’s rendering for Norton. All are scholarly and de- cat, in some places they are almost unreadable. But Grossman, who has translated Cervantes’s Spanish and Varga Lisa, has produced the most dis- tinguished, and the most literary, of them, and those qualities are amply dis- played on every page.

"Don Quixote" is the greatest of all fictional inquiries into the relation between fiction and reality, and so a good deal of the novel’s comedy is self- conscious, generated when one or more of the characters seems to step out of the book and appeal either to a nonfic- tional reality or directly to the audience.
Edith Grossman’s marvellous new translation (Ecco; $29.95), reminds us that “Don Quixote,” though it “may not be a scripture,” nonetheless captures all humanity, as Shakespeare does—which sounds more like religious lament than like secular caution.
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Living to Tell the Tale

GABRIEL GARCÍA MÁRQUEZ

Translated by Edith Grossman
DANCING TO "ALMENDRA"

A Novel

MAYRA MONTERO

Author of Captain of the Paper
Translated by Edith Grossman

I devoured it with absolute delight, and I'm looking forward to reading it again, and in making anything Montero might come up with next.

— Ro, You Tell 'Em! by Bruce
CAPTAIN OF THE SLEEPERS

A Novel

MAYRA MONTERO

Prepared by Edith Grossman
Nada
A Novel
CARMEN LAFORET
A NEW TRANSLATION BY EDITH GROSSMAN
INTRODUCTION BY MARIO VARGAS LLOSA

"Remarkable... After six decades, [Nada] has lost none of its power and originality, and we are fortunate to have it in this fine translation."
—The Washington Post Book Review
A MANUSCRIPT OF ASHES

ANTONIO MUÑOZ MOLINA

A Novel

Translated from the Spanish by EDITH GROSSMAN
2010s
why translation matters

Edith Grossman

“Edith Grossman, the Jane Coulde of translators, has written a superb book on the art of the literary translation. Even Walter Benjamin is surpassed by her insights into her task, which she rightly sees as imaginatively independent. This should become a classic text.” — Harold Bloom
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DESTINY AND DESIRE

A Novel

CARLOS FUENTES

Winner of the Cervantes Prize

Translated by

EDITH GROSSMAN
The Solitudes
A Dual-Language Edition with Parallel Text

Translated by EDITH GROSSMAN
Introduction by ALBREYO MANGJEL
IN THE NIGHT OF TIME

ANTONIO MUÑOZ MOLINA

TRANSLATED FROM THE SPANISH BY EDITH GROSSMAN

A NOVEL
Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz

SELECTED WORKS

translated by EDITH GROSSMAN

Introduction by JULIA ALVAREZ
Edith Grossman

Specialty: Spanish

# of Books Translated: “Somebody told me the other day it was 60. I don’t know if that’s true.”

First Notable Translation: *Drums for Rancas*, by Manuel Scorza

Noteworthy Authors: Miguel de Cervantes, Macedonio Fernández, Gabriel García Márquez, Mario Vargas Llosa, Mayra Montero

Known for: *Don Quixote*, by Miguel de Cervantes

Process: “I translate as carefully as I can for the first draft, because the more care I take in the beginning, the less time I have to spend at the end doing revisions.”

Next Up: *Exemplary Novels*, by Miguel de Cervantes
Why does translation matter, and to whom? I believe it matters for the same reasons and in the same way that literature matters—because it is crucial to our sense of ourselves as humans.

—Edith Grossman, *Why Translation Matters*