

FALL 2013

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REVIEW: ANA MARIA SHUA. *WITHOUT A NET*. TRANSLATED BY STEVEN J. STEWART. BROOKLYN, NY: HANGING LOOSE PRESS, 2012. ISBN 978-1934909287

Steven J. Stewart's translation of *Without a Net*, a collection of micro-fiction by the contemporary Argentinean writer Ana Maria Shua,, is a welcome addition to English-language translations of Latin American literature. Shua is well-known both in Argentina and abroad and her work has been widely translated. She has published over eighty books spanning a number of genres including poetry, prose, journalism, screenwriting, and micro-fiction. She is especially well-known for her flash fiction. Steven J. Stewart, a faculty member in the English Department at Brigham Young University, both translated and selected the stories in this collection. An experienced translator of both Spanish and Latin American fiction and poetry, Stewart is also especially familiar with Shua's work.

Micro-fictions (also referred to as flash fiction and short short fiction) are very short pieces, each about a half page long. More than any arbitrary set of guidelines limiting the length of the individual story, what defines a micro-fiction is the extent to which the reader fleshes out the story in his own mind. In this respect, micro-fiction is more akin to poetry than to the novel or even the traditional short story. The limited space afforded by only a few paragraphs leaves no room for complex story or character development, let alone for a discernible "meaning" or authorial message. Instead, the author merely suggests, thereby leaving it to the reader to interpret and imagine.

Poets and storytellers from the ancient Chinese to modern titans like Hemingway and Borges have tried their hand at various forms of micro-fiction. What distinguishes Shua's approach is her exclusive use of this form throughout a collection of stories. Here, flash fiction is not one form among many: it stands alone. She weaves together a series of distinct pieces centered on a single theme—the circus—to create a volume in which they come together as a whole.

At times we find what appears to be a simple story about the circus. Except that some detail all of a sudden pushes us into her world of fantasy, as for example in "Animal Rights"

En la segunda parte del siglo XX, la creciente defensa

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de los derechos de los animales afectó gravemente al circo tradicional. En 1982 el pequeño Circo Fallon, de Estados Unidos, fue acusado de hambrear y martirizar a sus animales, a los que se exhibía en jaulas tan sucias como estrechas y se azotaba sin piedad en cada función, para diversión y escándalo de los espectadores. El fiscal levantó la acusación cuando se comprobó que los damnificados eran en todos los casos actores disfrazados.

During the second half of the twentieth century, the growing concern for animal rights hit traditional circuses hard. In 1982, the tiny Fallon Circus in the United States was accused of starving and torturing its animals, which were exhibited in tiny, filthy cages and were mercilessly whipped at every event, to the audience's pleasure and outrage. The prosecutor dropped the charges when it was proven that in every case the victims were actors in disguise.

At other times, the mood is whimsical—almost, perhaps, tongue-in-cheek. In “Introduction to the Circus,” for example, the poet describes her craft as an act of balance, contortion, sharp-shooting and transformation. The circus, it would seem, is not only a metaphor for, but indistinguishable from the act of composition:

Arrojo al aire un sustantivo redondo. Antes de que caiga, con un disparo único, certero, logro que un adjetivo lo perforo en el centro mismo. Hago malabarismos con los verbos, camino per la cuerda floja de una sintaxis riesgosa. En medio de contorsiones extremas, azoto con mi látigo las palabras hasta obligarlas a saltar por los aros de fuego de un sentido inesperado. Entonces, en toda su variedad y esplendor, con lujosa minucia de oropeles, surge el circo. El público es usted, el espectáculo es unipersonal, por favor, elogie las fieras y no les cuente nada a los que están esperando afuera.

I toss a rounded noun into the air. With a singular, well-aimed shot, before it falls, I perforate its very

center with an adjective. I juggle verbs, I walk along the slack wire of risky syntax. In the midst of extreme contortions, I whip the words and make them leap through the ring of unexpected meaning. Then, in all its variety and splendor, in lush and glitzy detail, the circus emerges. You are the audience, the show is for you alone; please, applaud the wild animals and don't say anything to the people waiting outside.

In several stories, one character—a practical, kind, but jaded circus manager—serves as a foil for the extraordinary characters in his employ. In his translation Stewart does an admirable job of capturing both the manager's tone and demeanor—his “look, buddy, I'm trying to run a business here” attitude—and the author's playful sense of humor. Consider, for example, the following excerpt from “Perseus and the Head of Medusa,” in which the manager interviews Perseus:

Perseo está muy bien. Me gusta, es sonoro. Podríamos llamarlo “El Gran Perseo”. ¿Y qué necesita para su acto? Tenemos buenas luces y el mejor equipo de sonido. ¿El casco de Hades para hacerse invisible? No, vea, ese tipo de elementos los tiene que traer usted, se supone que forman parte de su número. Sí, lo mismo con las sandalias voladoras. Entiendo: eran prestadas y las tuvo que devolver a Hermes. Pero usted tiene muy buena presencia escénica, seguro que puede hacer algo con lo que trae encima. En ese bolso particular, por ejemplo. Ah, ya veo, no, no hace falta que me la muestre, la cabeza de Medusa es peligrosa. ¿No podrá atenuarse un poco esa mirada?...

Perseus is good. I like it, it has a nice sound. We could call you “Perseus the Great.” And what do you need for your act? We've got great lighting and a knockout sound system. The Helm of Hades to make yourself invisible? Sorry, look, you'd have to supply that sort of thing yourself—it would be part of your act. Yes, the same with the flying sandals. I get it: they were loaned to you and you had to give them back to Hermes. But you've got a lot of stage presence. I think you could

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make it work no matter what you had. Take, for instance, that bag you've got right there. Oh, I get it. No, you don't have to show me. Medusa's head is dangerous. Couldn't you water down her gaze a little?...

This passage serves as a particularly good example of the overall quality of Stewart's translation. His word choice and use of register capture the manager's character perfectly. Excellent touches such as the colloquial "we've got" instead of "we have", or "a knockout sound system" in the place of a more formal locution effectively turn the Argentinean impresario into an American hustler. Moreover, Stewart preserves the story's tone and meaning while making only minimal changes to the original text.

One actually has to search for the changes, they are so subtle. The English version consistently reads just like the Spanish original, except that here and there Stewart has tweaked a few words or phrases not only to make the text flow more elegantly in English but also (as in the example above) to put the characters in a better context for the American reader. Overall, this is an excellent translation.