

Translations into English from a Peripheral Country: The Case of Costa Rica

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Central America is a region with a rich literary production that has been overshadowed by the literary canon imposed not only from outside (mainly by the translations into English that conform the US canon of Latin American literature), but also by Latin America itself (for example, in the canon institutionalized by universities, ministries of education, and literary specialists). The general canon of Latin American literature established in the United States has usually grouped Latin American literature under one category that, unless given close analysis, does not allow for the identification of the literature that defines each one of the countries that comprise the Latin American region.

In the particular case of Costa Rica, one of the Central American countries, and which has a very vast literary tradition, none of the translations available in English has been included in the US canon mentioned above, and although these translations are rather scarce, they are the works that currently represent the writings of the country. The aim of this paper is, however, to show how this corpus of English translations of literary texts from Costa Rica fails to provide a complete representation of the literature of the country since it has left out the literary works from and about the marginal province of Guanacaste. Instead, the existing translations into English have favored the publications of Costa Rican writers from the Metropolitan or capital area and — in a much smaller number— of peripheral writers that deal with topics related to the black population and region. The choice of works from the capital area is not surprising, especially when authors from this region such as Carlos Gagini, Joaquín Gutiérrez and Carmen Naranjo are part of the Costa Rican literary canon. Even contrary to what was expected, several short stories by Costa Rican women writers have been translated in what comprises about 50 percent of the translations found for this study. Nevertheless, the absence of literature about the pampa, that is, the nature and the traditions of the “sabanero” or Costa Rican cowboy —recurring themes in the works of Guanacaste’s writers —, constitutes a gap in the representation of the country’s literature. The final proposal of this paper is, then, to fill this gap by encouraging the translation of the major literary works from Guanacaste.