

**Sophie Esch (Ed.) *Central American Literatures as World Literature*.
Bloomsbury, 2024. ISBN 978-1-5013-9187-3**

Nicasio Urbina
University of Cincinnati

The publication of *Central American Literatures as World Literature*, edited by Sophie Esch (Bloomsbury, 2024) fills in a void in the extensive discussion about national and regional literatures as World Literature. The book is divided into three sections and contains fifteen articles on different authors and topics related to Central American literatures. Part I, Modes, contains an article on Maya literature, an article on the Central American short story, an article on Central American *testimonio* as World Literature, and an article on Eduardo Halfon. In Section II, Constellations, we find an article on Rubén Darío, an article on the Salvadorian writer Alvaro Menen Desleal, one article on Roque Dalton, one on Horacio Castellanos Moya and one on Humberto Ak'abal. In Part III, Routes, we find an article on the Modernist's gaze on the Panama Canal, another article on the Nicaraguan poet Carlos Rigby, one article on U.S. Central Americans, and finally one article on migrant literature as World Literature.

It is timely that Bloomsbury published a volume in their series on World Literature about Central American literature as World Literature. They have published volumes on a wide variety of European literatures, even a volume on Roberto Bolaños as Word Literature. The long engrained disregard for Central America in general, is palpable on the tardiness of this publication, and the marginality of Central America is something that comes up again and again in most of the articles, marginality that seems to be growing rather than waning.

Sophie Esch offers a very extensive introduction where she discusses the definition and history of the concept of World Literature, from the concept of *Weltliteratur* proposed by Johann Wolfgang Goethe, until the many recent attempts to define what we understand as World Literature. Due to the variety and sometimes contradictory ideas of what World Literature is, we find different definitions and approaches throughout the book. Each author has a slightly different idea of what World Literature should be, which is at the same time a weakness in the volume, and a source of strength; it is not advisable to force a definition of World Literature and imposed it to the variety of authors, texts and phenomena included in the volume.

There is an imbalance in the book when you see that Costa Rica is not included at all, as if Costa Rican authors were not also participating in World Literature. Panama is not very well represented, since the only article that deals with that country is a European and American view of the Panama Canal Zone, and no Panamanian writer was included in the book. Most of the literature approached in this book comes from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua. One Honduran author and one author from Belize were discussed, and in the last section we find an article on the Central American literature in the diaspora. It is impossible to have a perfectly balanced representation of all countries and, being that the authors are professors in the American Academy, they are more concerned with and are more familiar with the countries that have gone through processes of national revolution or civil war, or countries who send large number of immigrants to the US. On the other hand, the book has articles on some of the best-known authors of Central America such as Rubén Darío, Augusto Monterroso, Horacio Castellanos Moya and Roque Dalton, but the majority of articles deal with lesser-known authors like Carlos Rigby, Menen Desleal, Eduardo Halfon and many younger new writers. There are two articles on Maya literature that add very important ideas to the discussion.

Sonia Esch and Ignacio Sarmiento Pérez co-authored an article on the Central American short story as World Literature, that in my view is a model article. They defined the short story genre as the most representative of Central America, mentioned a number of authors who cultivated the short story in Central America, and they dive into the works of Augusto Monterroso—the master of the genre in Central America—and Claudia Hernandez, a younger, very talented short story writer from El Salvador. Tamara de Inés Antón offers a good article on *testimonio* as World Literature, analysing *I Rigoberta Menchú* and *They Won't Take Me Alive* by Claribel Alegria and Bud Flakoll (although Flakoll's name was erased from the English translation). Anton discusses in detail the translation of these texts, and the marketing strategies that the English language publishers use to promote these works. This is very important in the context of World Literature, because publishing houses, translators, and agents have a very consequential effect on the canonization of the text as World Literature. Finally in this Section 1 we find an article by Magdalena Perkowska about the Guatemalan American Jewish writer Edward Halfon, a case that she finds “extraordinary and intriguing” (82). In her article she discussed the place of birth and the ethnic heritage in Halfon's works, and the themes represented in them, usually dealing with Jewish identity, holocaust and Israel, topics not properly Central American. She concludes by saying that “There is no doubt that Halfon's autofictions on Jewish themes translate and travel well” (95).

Part II of the book starts with an article on Darío by Carlos F. Grisby, where he traces the concept of cosmopolitanism in Darío's works from 1896 to the end of his life in 1916, in order to demonstrate the disillusionment of Darío for cosmopolitanism and French culture. Carolyn Fornoff offers an excellent essay on the Salvadoran writer Alvaro Menen Desleal, who wrote remarkable science fiction short stories. Fornoff considers these stories not an escapist endeavour, but as she affirms, “Menen Desleal utilizes galactic settings and non-human narrators to decenter the human from the epicenter of narrative and

planetary history” (136). The article on Roque Dalton was written by Yansi Pérez, and the one on Horacio Castellano Moya was penned by Tamara L. Mitchell. The third part of the book, *Routes*, deals more with diasporic narratives, and the thousands of Central Americans that travel across México to reach the U.S. border. Tatiana Arguello writes an article on Carlos Rigby which title will summarize her argument, “Creole Poetics of the Ocean: Carlos Rigby Ecological Thought, and Caribbean Diasporic Consciousness”. I am running out of space and will not be able to comment or mention all the authors in this volume. However, in the final article, Roberto McKee Irving discusses the status of books like *Caravaneros* by Douglas Oviedo, from Honduras; and *Sobrevivientes* by Ustil Pascal Dubuisson, from Haiti. These are books about their journey to the U.S. and were published in Mexico. Irving proposes that “The testimonial literature of migrations might best be understood as its own stateless genre, especially when its authors not only write about the transnational context of their migration routes but do so when still in the process of migrating” (255).

In conclusion this is a very important contribution to the study of Central American literatures. Many canonical writers were excluded, even though they have a more wide-ranging impact across the world, but I understand that the editor wanted to include younger and marginalised writers, whose status may be more problematic when considered as World Literature.