

**Costa Rican Short
Stories of Anguish and
Landscapes**

Carlos Salazar Herrera

**Costa Rican Short
Stories of Anguish and
Landscapes**

María Luz Méndez Salazar
Translator and Researcher





©EUNA

Editorial Universidad Nacional

Heredia, Campus Omar Dengo

Costa Rica

Teléfono: (506) 2562-6754

Correo electrónico: euna@una.cr

Apartado postal: 86-3000 (Heredia, Costa Rica)

La Editorial Universidad Nacional (EUNA), es miembro del Sistema Editorial Universitario Centroamericano (SEDUCA).

© Costa Rican Short Stories of Anguish and Landscapes

Carlos Salazar Herrera

María Luz Méndez Salazar

Translator and Researcher

Primera edición 2016

Dirección editorial: Alexandra Meléndez C. amelende@una.cr

Diseño de portada: Jania Umaña con base en una foto de Rafael Esteban

Molina Méndez

Imágenes del autor (Carlos Salazar Herrera)

CR863.4

S161c

Salazar Herrera, Carlos, 1909-1980

Costa Rican short stories of anguish and landscapes / Carlos Salazar Herrera; María Luz Méndez Salazar translator and researcher; [imágenes del autor Carlos Salazar Herrera].

-- 1. ed. -- Heredia, C. R. : EUNA, 2016.

166 p. : 22 cm.

ISBN 978-9977-65-466-9

1. CUENTOS COSTARRICENSES 2. LITERATURA COSTARRICENSE I. Méndez Salazar, María Luz, 1957- II. Título III. Título: Cuentos de angustias y paisajes

De conformidad con el Artículo 16 de la Ley N.º 6683, Ley sobre Derechos de Autor y Derechos Conexos, se prohíbe la reproducción parcial o total no autorizada de esta publicación por cualquier medio o procedimiento mecánico electrónico, con excepción de lo estipulado en los artículos N.º 70 y N.º 73 de la misma ley, en los términos que estas normas y su reglamentación delimitan (Derecho de cita y Derecho de Reproducción no autorizada con fines educativos).

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface.....	9
The Bocaracá	29
The Bridge	33
The Limestone Quarry	37
The Young Bull	43
The Gourd	45
The Bongo.....	49
Ambushed	53
The Witch.....	59
The Cricket.....	63
The Kiss	67
The Shout	71
The Window.....	75
The Dulzaina	77
The Mestizo	81
The Colors.....	83
The Boatman.....	87

The Drought	91
The Rainstorm.....	95
The Marsh	99
The Folk Healer	101
The Braid	105
The Halfbreed	107
The Still.....	111
The Mountain.....	115
The Hours.....	119
The Road.....	123
The Chilamate Tree.....	127
One Night.....	131
A Gasp of Air	137
The Dugout	141
Bibliography	145

PREFACE : A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF THE TRANSLATION

Costa Rican Stories of Anguish and Landscapes is the translated version into English of one of the most important books in Costa Rican literature: the masterpiece *Cuentos de angustias y paisajes* written in 1947 by Carlos Salazar-Herrera. Within this collection of 30 short stories, the author described the day-to-day activities of his characters with a stylized, idiosyncratic romanticism. First published as individual narrations in *Repertorio Americano*, -a Costa Rican cultural magazine by Joaquín García-Monge, another representative of Costa Rican literature-, most of the short stories contain dialogues in the vernacular speech of the country's folks from the 1950's. Salazar-Herrera's work became one of the pillars of Costa Rican art and literature in the second half of the twentieth century. Having won his first literary prize at the age of fourteen, his short stories detailed colorful descriptions of the color and texture of the local flora and fauna, creating a close connection between the reader and the texts. Being an artist in so many fields, his stories are enhanced by skillfully chosen lexicon to portray the social and academic status of his characters. Picturing the peasants, their environment and the nature of their struggles, this book helps familiarize the reader with the Spanish spoken in Costa Rica during the first half of the 20th century, a speech which follows neither grammatical rules nor standard vocabulary, so much so that the original Spanish version in contains a glossary to clarify the use of those unfamiliar terms for the current Costa Rican reader.

The universal feelings that his simple-natured characters bear are diluted in a prose that is as poetic as the narrative allows. The reader can recollect details to picture a clear image of the scenarios in which the characters survive or perish. Salazar-Herrera traces his words as a painter would use his brush or a sculptor his chisel: a sentence here and another carefully chosen there, and before the reader appears an impressionist portrait of each and every event of the story.

The translation of the complex prose used to describe the Costa Rican landscape in which the characters endure life has been a challenge since each short story is segmented into prose sections with highly figurative language and some of them do not even have dialogues at all; such is the case of *The Shout*, *The Cricket*, *The Rainstorm*, and *The Drought*, to name some. The characters are not always peasants, but also simple narrators who use standard language of the events: as the traveler who gets aboard the vessel in *The Bongo*, the man who first speaks and then listens to the description of the events in *The Mestizo*, or the doctor and the nurse who help the ox-herder in *The Road*.

Even though many have written about Salazar-Herrera's *Cuentos de angustias y paisajes*, Andrés Camacho is the only one who has written a pocket book about this artist. In Camacho's words, Salazar-Herrera was a good scholar in so many fields, but above all he was an artist who used subjectivity in choosing his words to represent the reality of the landscapes he wrote about in his stories (25). Lilia Ramos, also quoted by Camacho, says Costa Rica's presence in the stories is translucent, accurate, and vigorous: the firmament, the ground, the air, the sun and the moon, the mountain, the hill, the prairie, the river, the sea, the shore, the river banks, the gulf, the bay, the beach, the fauna, the flora, the hidden small towns are all present in the stories (Camacho 15); in all of them is the humble presence of the peasant; as the rain, the jungle, the storm, the cold and the hot weather, the highest peaks, the day and the night also are. Given

all of the above, and knowing Salazar-Herrera's so valuable role in Costa Rican literature, for purposes of translation, it was very important to remain faithful to the words and the punctuation as he used it in his prose.

Salazar-Herrera's short stories were written during the early days of the twentieth century, when the country offered only poverty to most of its people. A selected few had taken over the coffee oligarchy; there were those who exploited the working class, among them the money lenders, as well as the simple peasants, which included *cholos* (indigenous rooted), blacks, and farm workers. All of these characters are brought to light through the artistic genre called *Costumbrismo* which took its first steps here in Costa Rica.

Salazar-Herrera gathered the short stories he published over a period of fifteen years in the *Repertorio Americano* magazine, and then published them under the title *Cuentos de angustias y paisajes*, a book for which he made 28 engravings that illustrate twenty eight of his thirty stories. The masterpiece was so well received by the public that, in 1964, he won the highest award a person can achieve for his/her contribution to the country's culture: *Premio Nacional de Cultura Magón*. *Cuentos de angustias y paisajes* has become a textbook of privileged position in Costa Rican literature, currently read by scholars as well as readers who appreciate Costa Rican folk literature.

It is interesting the way the author uses ellipsis throughout all the short stories, as if letting the reader form his own opinion of the plot and decide about the ending of the story. In an effort to be faithful to the original, ellipsis was left in the translation, even though in some cases they may seem unnecessary. The stories vary in length: from one and a half to four pages long, each page containing an average of thirty five lines per page. Many one-sentence paragraphs are found and a double space set in between some of them, as if the reader had to pay special attention to the events, or assume a solemn and mysterious tone in regards to the narration.

A lot of translation effort was put into describing the intricate landscape and interpreting the different feelings of the characters in each of the short stories; but American Standard English served that purpose. However, recreating the simplicity of the speech and narrative thoughts of the peasants in the target language was a task undertaken by establishing a systematic procedure using African American Vernacular English as the dialect to represent the speech of the local characters.

African American Vernacular English (AAVE) is the literary language chosen intentionally by the translator to maintain the spirit of the dialogues of the Spanish text. In an effort to transmit the idiosyncrasy of the main characters of his short stories, Carlos Salazar Herrera showed peasants as simple people, not academically trained, attached to religion and often shy. The use of regionalisms, such as: “finquita”, “ñor”, “ni me haga juerza”, and “encariñao”, depict the phonetic aspects of the dialect, as well as its regional vocabulary and syntax of Costa Rican peasants, carefully reproduced in most of the thirty short stories found in the book, as seen in the following segment taken from the story *La calera*:

“- <i>Hombré</i> , Eliseo... ¿Le compro esta finquita con casa, calera, carreta y yunta?”	“Say, Eliseo... why <i>don’tya</i> sell me this farm, with the house, limestone quarry, cart and yoke?”
-No, Ñor Rosales, cómo va a <i>crer</i> ...	“No, <i>Ñor</i> Rosales...how can ya say <i>dat</i> ?”
-Vea, Eliseo, yo soy hombre de poco platicar. Le doy <i>sesentamil</i> pesos, billete sobre billete.	“Eliseo, I’m a man of few words. I’ll <i>giveya</i> sixty thousand <i>pesos</i> , cash.”
-No, <i>Ñor</i> Rosales. La oferta es buena, pero ni me haga <i>juerza</i> porque no la vendo. (21)	“No, <i>Ñor</i> Rosales. <i>Yer</i> offer’s mighty good, but I <i>ain’t</i> selling.” (9)

The dialect used by most characters in the stories is from the Costa Rican Central Valley; however, when Salazar-Herrera wanted to represent the origin of one his characters, he could

be so careful as to include a simple word such as “*pues*,” indicating that the character was from Costa Rican Northern region (Camacho 19). Silva-Carvalán, in her book *Sociolingüística y pragmática*, describes this phenomenon as the use of a vernacular dialect: “native to or commonly spoken by the members of a particular country or region” (2009). Understanding vernacular as the relation to a dialect geographically established and spoken by common people, the English translation is aimed at demonstrating the plausibility of translating a folk dialect with a parallel form used by common people geographically established in a region of the target culture with a similar linguistic background to that of characters of the source text. Just like the folk Spanish dialect of the stories, AAVE has unconventional phonetic and grammatical features, reproducing the particular characteristics of the language spoken by common people of the South of the United States, most of them African American. Used as a literary dialect, it would not follow the spelling rules established by prescriptive grammar. Quoted by Mark Canada, Thomas Pyles and John Algeo define a standard language as “... one that is used widely, in many places and for many purposes; ... [it] enjoys high prestige, ... people regard [it] as ‘good’ language;” hence, the decision to translate the narrative of the short stories using Standard English: a language which obeys the rules set down by prescriptive grammarians. However, the Spanish spoken by the characters is a nonstandard Spanish variance, commonly found in Costa Rican folk literature. The many non-typical grammatical choices were made on purpose by the author to reflect the social status and/or the academic level of education of the peasants. At first glance, translating the dialogues of these short stories appeared to be an almost impossible task, for they do not follow the grammatical rules of Standard Spanish. However, failing to connect the reader of the translated text to the spirit of its original in Spanish one would have meant failing Salazar-Herrera’s purpose of introducing the simple nature of the characters as well as the

stoicism with which they endure the day to day events of their lives, which is reflected in their way of speaking. Hence, it became necessary to look for a variation in the target language which would convey the Spanish forms into English; that was how the idea of using AAVE came about.

The vast literature about the origin of AAVE agrees that it began from the minute of the first introduction of a few African slaves to Virginia at the beginning of the 1600's, importation that quickly spread slavery to other Southern states. Once the Civil War came to an end, slavery was abolished, and the blacks, as well as an important number of white people who were familiar with the variation, began migration movements to all parts of the country. That is why thousands of African-American descendants, living in the United States today, speak some form of AAVE.

Previously known as Black English, AAVE refers to the variety of English originally spoken by African Americans, especially those of the working class in urban neighborhoods or rural communities in the United States. Outside the community of scholars, it is often referred to as Ebonics, a combination of ebony and phonics (Smitherman 28). This dialect has been at the heart of many debates among sociolinguists for different reasons: many tend to assume that, regardless of their background, only African Americans speak it, that all African Americans speak it, and that it is spoken only in the United States. However, nowadays it is known that these varieties are spoken by all the ethnicities inside and outside the United States, such as the Caribbean and the United Kingdom. This assertion is accurately exemplified in J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* by "Hagrid," one of the white main characters, who speaks a language variation with clear presence of a Vernacular dialect with phonological and syntactic features. The following is an excerpt from this book representing a vernacular form of speech.

Hagrid's Sample Speech	Analysis of the Speech
<p>1. "<i>Las</i>' time I saw you, <i>you was</i> only a baby... <i>Yeh</i> look a lot like <i>yer</i> dad, but <i>yeh've</i> got <i>yer</i> mom's eyes" (47).</p>	<p>The final "t" of the word "last" was eliminated due to linking. Instead of writing "<i>last time</i>," she omits one "t".</p> <p>The personal pronoun "<i>you</i>" is replaced by "<i>yeh</i>" and the possessive pronoun "<i>your</i>" is changed by "<i>yer</i>".</p> <p>In addition, the conjugation of the verb "<i>to be</i>" is different: in standard English the past tense form of the verb "to be" for the pronoun "you" is "<i>were</i>" while, in this example, the character uses "<i>was</i>."</p>
<p>2. "... A very happy birthday to <i>yeh</i>. Got <i>summat fer yeh</i> here – I <i>mighta</i> sat on it at some point" (47).</p>	<p>There is no subject before the verb as in: "<i>ø got summat fer yeh here</i>."</p> <p>Also, the preposition "<i>for</i>" is replaced by "<i>fer</i>" due to phonological variation.</p> <p>Then, the auxiliary "<i>have</i>" in the past participle is reduced to "<i>a</i>" and linked to the modal "<i>might</i>;" it then becomes "<i>mighta</i>." In regards to vocabulary, the word "<i>summat</i>" is substituting "<i>something</i>."</p>
<p>3. "I'd not say no <i>ter summat</i> stronger if <i>yeh've</i> got it, mind." (48)</p>	<p>The preposition "<i>to</i>" is replaced by "<i>ter</i>." "<i>yeh've</i>" is an abbreviation of "<i>you have</i>."</p>
<p>4. "<i>Yer</i> great <i>puddin'</i> of a son <i>don'</i> need <i>fattenin'</i> anymore, Dursley, <i>don'</i> worry" (49).</p>	<p>Here it is found the reduction of the [ŋ] sound which is substituted by a [n] sound; as in <i>puddin'</i> and <i>fatenin'</i>.</p> <p>The final sound in the negative auxiliary <i>don't</i> is transformed into <i>don'</i>.</p>

Hagrid's Sample Speech	Analysis of the Speech
5. "A wizard, <i>o</i> ' course... <i>an</i> ' a <i>thumpin' good'un</i> , I say, once <i>yeh've</i> been trained up a bit..." (51).	Final sounds are eliminated due to the linking or omission in the speech; for example, " <i>o' course</i> " instead of " <i>of course</i> ," " <i>an</i> " instead of " <i>and</i> "...the pronunciation of some words change because of linking as it was previously mentioned: in this example <i>good'un</i> means <i>good one</i> .
6. "...I can't tell <i>yeh everything</i> ', it's a great <i>myst'ry</i> ..." (54).	In this case, the word <i>mystery</i> is reduced to <i>myst'ry</i> . Here, the [ə] sound was eliminated because the stress falls on the initial syllable.
7. " <i>Blimey</i> , this is difficult..." (54).	There is an agglutination of vowels in the case of the word " <i>blimey</i> " which means <i>believe me</i> .
8. " <i>Got'em</i> too – some afraid, some just wanted a little bit <i>o</i> ' his power, ' <i>cause</i> he was <i>gettin'</i> himself power..." (54).	Linking is the main characteristic in this case. The expression <i>got'em</i> means <i>got them</i> . The 'f' is omitted from "of" and then, reduction appears as in the case of " <i>cause</i> " instead of <i>because</i> .

There is much controversy in regards to the how the variance was born, as the scholars think that the variance might have been developed as a result of several types of interaction, three of which are considered here:

- 1) Speakers of African Languages interacted with speakers of other vernacular English varieties. Plantations in the Southern coasts (Georgia, South Carolina, and others) presented the perfect scenario for a small number of their natives, mainly hired labor, to interact with the West Africans. A process of creolization followed the pidgin which was first developed. As described in Early American Speech Adoptions from Foreign Tongues:

The only English many of them [slaves] ever heard from native speakers was that of the illiterate or semiliterate white indentured servants with whom they worked in the fields or who were set over them as overseers...It is not surprising that their accomplishment fell considerable short of perfect. Their English was sort of jargon or pidgin, which passed into use by their descendants a native language (Pyles 77).

- 2) Through several processes of language acquisition, the newly arrived West Africans developed a Creole-like form of communication, due to the isolation in which they lived. Contrary to what was established previously, the encounters with those who followed the English grammatical rules of the time were so few that the speakers of the West African languages gathered new vocabulary whenever they met, and, with the help of what scholars call universal grammar, followed the grammatical patterns common to the West African languages. That is how Gullah, or Sea Islands Creole, still spoken in the coastal islands of South Carolina and Georgia, was born. This must be why Luedtke affirms:

“While today ‘freedom’ and the inroads of twentieth-century forces, most notably Gullah out-migration and real estate developments, have diminished Gullah land-holdings and isolation, the distinctive culture persists in many ways” (quoted by Pyles 344).

- 3) To other scholars neither one of the above mentioned theories is acceptable. They argue that the demographic conditions to fully develop a Creole in the United States and the Caribbean were not met. Instead they say that the current characteristics of AAVE have their roots in varieties of the English spoken in Great Britain and the Southern states of the United States. To them, AAVE is the

result of a process of acquisition undergone by Africans while interacting with British and other English speaking white people while slavery was taking place. So, on the other hand, Cleanth Brooks affirms that:

...Southern speech traces itself back to England, whether to earlier Standard English or to provincialisms of the south, and southwest counties, it rapidly becomes apparent that any theory of Negro influence must be abandoned. The Negro learned his speech from the colonist... The Negro has then preserved many of these original forms, even after most of the whites have discarded them (139).

Whatever theory is considered, there is a fact known to those who have studied the history of the South: white children of the Southern aristocracy had black nannies who helped to raise them, and children make no difference of color at the time of playing; therefore, through a process of acquisition that made their learning more lasting, whites and blacks gradually influenced their respective speech through these forms of interaction. This is especially true to anyone whose parents have English as a second language. Due to the social isolation in which African Americans lived since they were uprooted from their respective countries, however, the bond created among them was tighter, and their form of speech kept more of their initial features through time.

It would be hard to decide which scholar is correct about the beginnings of this English variation or to establish an exact pattern of pronunciation for each person who speaks it, as each person has his or her own idiolect distinctively. However, the relevance of choosing this variance for this work lies on the fact that it represents a speaker who is usually of humble origins and, most likely, low academic education, just like Costa Ricans peasants were in the midst of the early twentieth century.

Having analyzed the background of AAVE, following is the translation into English of the masterpiece *Cuentos de angustias y paisajes*. Hope you may transport yourself into the landscapes of our souls.

María Luz Méndez Salazar
Translator and Researcher

