

Americans Are Not Ogres: The Translation of Mexican Literature in the US During The Cold War

Translated literature plays a key role in the renewal of international and national literary scenes. However, the introduction of foreign authors and their texts into specific national settings via translation can also serve other purposes that may not be necessarily related with their literary and aesthetic values. This was the case of the so called “Latin American boom” where, to a large extent, the translation of authors such as Gabriel García Márquez, Julio Cortázar, and Octavio Paz, to mention but a few; was aimed at fighting against the ‘Communist threat’, which seemed particularly dangerous against the backdrop of the Cuban Revolution and the victory of the revolutionary forces.

In this course we will focus on the texts of Mexican writers whose translations into English were supported and promoted by various American public and private institutions, such as the Guggenheim Fund, the Center for Inter American Relations (CIAR), and the Rockefeller and Ford Foundations, as part of American “national interest” in the region. The main objective of the course is to analyze literary texts that were translated under different funding programs. The specter will cover various literary genres, such as short fiction, essay, novel, poetry, and biography. Selected pieces will be read through the lens of our larger frame provides and along two lines: the aesthetic and the ideological. The first axis would emphasize the artists’ craft and skills as well as the translator’s profile. The second approach would reveal recurring topics and stereotypes about Mexico.