
Jeremy Bentham, Utopia, Paradise, and Costa Rica

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Jeremy Bentham "planned, schemed, [and] worked for the establishment of a New World utilitarian utopia" (Williford, 87).^[1] According to Miriam Williford, in her *Jeremy Bentham on Spanish America: An Account of His Letters and Proposals to the New World*, "Bentham foresaw Spanish America as an area destined to stability and equity, wherein the universal interest of the subject many would always predominate over those of the ruling few" (31). Williford's reading of Bentham's manuscripts at the British Museum, as well as those at King's College at Cambridge University and University College in London shows Bentham to be "gratified by the political achievements of some Spanish American leaders, particularly Bernardino Rivadavia in Buenos Aires" yet at the same time fully aware that, "in spite of [Bentham's] own endeavors and the desires of many well-wishers, the conditions in Spanish America were hardly conducive to the growth of the Benthamic utopia of which he dreamed" (31). One of those conditions was the simple fact that "the area was not sufficiently developed to take on the major task of the construction of an interoceanic canal" (Williford, 87).

Just as in the United States where Thomas Jefferson sent Lewis and Clark off to find a Northwest Passage that would link the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, Spain had wanted a water passage to connect the two oceans since 1513 when Núñez Balboa "discovered" the Pacific Ocean.^[2] In a letter to Bernardino Rivadavia, minister of state for Buenos Aires, dated the thirteenth of June, 1822, Bentham told Rivadavia that he had already mentioned his own idea for an interoceanic canal to Simón Bolívar. In the same letter, Bentham noted how he had mentioned the possibility of such a canal to Bolívar's agent in London, Echeverría, and learned from him that Colombia was already considering such a project and had sent an engineer to make surveys for a possible canal. According to Williford, Bentham relied upon a single source for the basic geographical parts of his plan, William Davis Robinson's *Memoirs of the Mexican Revolution* published in 1821 (94). Although Robinson proposed two sites for such a canal, one being through the Mexican Isthmus or the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, Bentham seems to have ignored this part of Robinson's work. Bentham concentrated on a Nicaraguan route for his plan. Robinson's other proposed route, however, takes us right through the heart of what was to become Central America's putative paradise. As quoted in Williford, Robinson attempted "to elucidate the extraordinary and peculiar advantages which Costa Rica possesses for the establishment of a navigable intercourse between the two seas" (94). Because of geography, Costa Rica, very early in its history, lies at the nexus of the attempt to develop a Central American utopia. Of course, Bentham never communicated directly with any Costa Rican leader, as he did with Rivadavia and Bolívar. However, Bentham did maintain a six year correspondence with at least one Central American leader, José del Valle of Guatemala. Williford notes that "the Spanish American leader who probably took Bentham most seriously in his endeavors to apply utilitarian philosophy to the creation of a new government was Bernardino Rivadavia of Buenos Aires" (114); however, it was Del Valle (born in Honduras in 1776) who most mourned Bentham's death. Del Valle "had been instrumental in achieving Central American independence from Spain and Mexico and had narrowly missed becoming the first president of the Central American Federation" (Williford, 117). According to Williford, Del Valle "fit perfectly into Bentham's scheme for Spanish America" (117), especially after Bentham's falling out with Bolívar who had abandoned utilitarian principles. Del Valle's correspondence with Bentham began in 1826 and continued until Bentham's death. It was Del Valle who first referred to Bentham as the "legislator of the world" and who wrote in a letter to Bentham on April 18, 1827, "The political world is in movement; all the states desire to improve their laws, and you have pointed out the line by which they ought to march in order not to be devoured by anarchy, nor destroyed by despotism" (quoted in Williford, 134). Two weeks before introducing a resolution to the congress of the Central American Republic asking its members to show the proper respect at the death of Bentham, Del Valle published an article in the *Gaceta Federal* (Guatemala) on September 17, 1832 in which he pleaded to fellow Central Americans that they endeavor to realize Bentham's dream of a Spanish American utilitarian utopia. Del Valle implored, "let us venerate the memory of this benefactor of humanity ... that the luminious (sic) principles that he had irrevocably established by means of his works, may preside in our assemblies, governments, and tribunals, and thus we will build our happiness upon indestructable foundations" (quoted in Williford, 135).

Bentham first mentioned one of those principles in a letter to Jean Baptiste Say, dated January 18, 1827, "For an infant State in which Books are in a manner unknown, choice of Books is a branch of legislation" (Williford, 107). Bentham reached this conclusion as a result of developing a list of works which he thought would contribute to the founding of a public library in Central America. Del Valle's cousin, Próspero de Herrera, carried with him on a trip to London a list of books which Del Valle wished him to acquire while in Europe. Although the primary purpose of Herrera's trip was to solicit English funding to exploit the family mines in Guatemala, a secondary objective was to acquire the books on the list that Del Valle had sent with his cousin. After a meeting with Herrera, Bentham took the task to heart and consequently wrote the "Memorandum Works for Guatemala" (Williford, 109). In addition to a code of laws for Guatemala, Bentham developed a catalogue of books which he hoped would form "the commencement of a public library for the formation thereby of the public mind" (Williford, 109).

The impact of books on the public mind, particularly how novels contribute to the development of a national character and culture is the basis of Doris Sommer's *Foundational Fictions: The National Romances of Latin America*. Sommer points out that the concept of the national novel needs no explanation in Latin America; "it is the book frequently required in the nation's secondary schools as a source of local history" (4). The close relationship between books and the public mind is evidenced by "the page-long list, by the turn of the century, of Hispano-American writers who were also presidents of their countries" (4). Sommer's two principle concerns in her book are: 1) "To show the inextricability of politics from fiction in the history of nation-building" and 2) "to locate an erotics of politics, to show how a variety of novel national ideals are all ostensibly grounded in 'natural' heterosexual love and in the marriages that provided a figure for apparently nonviolent consolidation during internecine conflicts at mid-century" (6). Although the two Costa Rican "utopian" texts that will be addressed below, Fabian Dobles' *El sitio de las abras* and Tatiana Lobo's *Asalto al paradiso* are 20th century novels, they both confront these issues. Dobles does so in his attempt to situate the origins of an agrarian utopia; and Lobos does so in her assault on the false history perpetuated on the public mind by the Costa Rican secondary school reading list. Likewise, although through quite different means, both novels offer a strategem to comply with another component of foundational narratives. Each novel, in its way, like those Sommer discusses in her book, is "an exhortation to be fruitful and multiply" (6). Sommer is concerned with the relationship of marriage and desire to nation building. For her, "happiness reads like a wish-fulfilling projection of national consolidation and growth" (7). In as much as happiness, or "the greatest happiness to the greatest number" is the basic utilitarian maxim and for Jeremy Bentham the object of government was "the happiness of the nation" (Williford, 49), it is not surprising that Sommer refers to Bentham. In a section called "Romance Realized" Sommer notes how the newly independent societies of Spanish America "experimented with liberalism adapted from examples in Great Britain (Bentham was a great favorite), the United States and France" (13). Furthermore, just as the newly independent states looked to Europe for guidance in developing their civil codes and imitated the novels that were popular in Europe, "America was Europe's ideal, imaginary, realm for the bourgeoisie's project of coordinating sense with sensibility, productivity with passion. It was, to cite the specific example of Jeremy Bentham, a realizable utopia, the place where his reasonable laws (solicited by American admirers like Bolívar, San Martín, Rivadavia, and Del Valle) could bring the greatest good to the greatest number" (14).

Of course, increasing the number of Americans in order to better build these new nations was also a consideration. Sommer recalls that after winning independence, America needed civilizers, "founding fathers of commerce and industry, not fighters" (15). She cites Juan Bautista Alberdi, whose notes for Argentina's 1853 constitution became a standard of political philosophy throughout Latin America, "glory has ceded its place to utility and comfort, and military heroism is not the most competent medium for the *prosaic* needs of commerce and industry" (15). Alberdi agreed with Domingo F. Sarmiento on the need to "fill up the desert, to make it disappear". Sommer paraphrases Alberdi's slogan, "to govern is to populate" as "Husband the land and father your countries" (15). For her, this is another incidence of the correlation between erotics and politics, building a family and building a country. Sommer reads José Marmol's *Amalia* and Romulo Gallego's *Doña Bárbara*, among other 19th century novels, as evidence of just this sort of correspondence.

In Costa Rica, in 1945 and 1946, Fabian Dobles writes exactly the same sort of text with his *El sitio de las abras*. In response to an interview question asked of him by the historian Ricardo Blanco, Dobles comments, "[*El sitio de las abras*] narra algo que sucedió y no sucedió, pero sigue sucediendo.. Al río, al monte, al agro nacional y sobre todo al campesino pobre del siglo pasado, generándose incesantemente desembocó en el presente" (cited on rear cover). Dobles' own account of his novel underscores its allegorical dimension, according to Sommer's definition of

allegory. While the author himself never imputed any utopian aspects to his work and apparently accepted its classification as an "agrarian novel", the simple fact is that the Costa Rican Ministry of Education placed *El sitio de las abras* on the required reading list for the nation's secondary schools thereby following Bentham's notion that an educated, literate public is a necessary ingredient for eventually forming an utopian society based upon his utilitarian model. This fact, likewise, situates the text as among those foundational fictions which Sommer so skillfully defines.

For Costa Rica, *El sitio de las abras*, is the sort of national romance which can be a source of local history and which can contribute to the formation of the public mind and the development of the national character. In other words, the required reading of *El sitio de las abras*, according to those who put the book on the national reading list can yet contribute to the development of a Central American utopia. The fact that Dobles was awarded the National Prize for Literature in 1969, for his extensive work which includes short stories, poetry, and other novels, but particularly for *El sitio* validates Dobles' central place among Costa Rican authors. The further fact that the national publishing house, Editorial Costa Rica, came out with the second edition of the novel in the year subsequent to the prize confirms the status of this book as a foundational fiction for Costa Rica.

Dobles' text has achieved this status not because of its intrinsic literary value, but because Dobles narrates an edenic, utopian "history" of the "civilizing" of the nation, the sort of history which the nation's ruling elite wishes the public mind to believe. The novel/allegory (allegory because Dobles frequently reminds his readers that the text can and should be read as the history of a family, particularly the family and descendants of Espíritu Santo Vega, and as the history of the nation) begins with the creation of the *abras*, those openings or clearings in the forest which eventually give way to farms which cede their place, in turn, to coffee plantations and eventually, metaphorically, to the entire nation. Throughout the novel, Dobles effectively reminds the reader not only of the passage of time, "Y las hachas llegaron" (12), "Y así terminó la infancia de las abras" (80), "Y la vida continuaba" (90), "Transcurrieron algunos años" (109), "Los años transcurrieron sobre los años" (122), "¡Cuánto tiempo ha pasado" (128), but more importantly Dobles emphasizes the importance of knowing family and national history. So, when young Martín returns to the *abras*, he listens to the family histories told him by his ancient Uncle Remigio, and begins to understand "de modo más real y hondo que antes de su fácil felicidad actual habían existido otros hombres y otros tiempos de los cuales quedaban, árboles arrancados, con las doloridas raíces crispadas al viento, su madre, su tata y el tío abuelo. Empezaba a ser partícipe de aquel pesado agobio que de ellos emanaba" (144). Shortly afterwards, anxious to hear more stories, to learn more about his family history and his own identity, Martín goes to live with Remigio who, night after night, would recount the family stories. Martín "las oía con nueva y diferente devoción, viendo en sí mismo la continuación de todo aquello y alimentando su alma" (148). Eventually Martín understood just what Dobles wanted all of his readers to recognize and we understand why the Costa Rican Ministry of Education requires the reading of this novel, for the development of the public mind. Martín thought that "su tío abuelo no había vivido para morir, como él creía. Había sembrado" (155). In this agrarian novel, Dobles plants the seeds of a national culture. For him (and the Ministry of Education), as well as for young Martín, "Las abras, los sueños de ñor Espíritu Santo y su mujer, ... Todo eso tenía sentido. Era historia, Sí, era como para ponerse a meditar" (155). Finally, Remigio shouts to Martín what he and his countrymen understand; they are the children of their parents, the descendants of their ancestors who founded the country. It is this sense of history which allows Martín for the first time to comprehend what Señorita Leflair had told him years ago, "que todos los seres humanos deben ser realmente iguales en oportunidades y en derechos. Con el tiempo llegará de algún modo a conseguirse. Muchos hombres han luchado y siguen luchando por esto, pero aún faltan más Bastillas que derribar" (155). In fact, this is why Martín returns to his childhood home as a labor organizer. He is called a communist for agitating the "parasites", but, in fact, he is simply recalling the liberal, democratic ideals of the French Revolution, and fighting for the happiness that Bentham had promised the world if it but implemented the policies he devised and adopted the civil codes which he developed. For Martín Vega Villalta, as well as for all of the high school students in Costa Rica who are required to read this novel, "Era necesario no perder la alegría, el optimismo, el deseo de vivir para vivir" (156). Happiness and the possibility of a Costa Rican utopia still exist, or so the Ministry of Education wants us to believe.

While Espíritu Santo Vega and his literal and figurative descendants were clearing away the forest, turning those openings into the farms that would grow into haciendas and repeating the whole process, "En la capital, en las pequeñas ciudades y aldeas donde los hombres luchaban e iban logrando implantar las ideas liberales, ...", completely unaware of what was happening in the countryside (116). The young nation was developing on two fronts.

Naturally, none of this would have been possible without what Sommer has noted as the other aspect of the foundational fictions, the erotics of politics. When Dolores informs her husband, Espíritu Santo, that once again she is pregnant, he responds, "Con este hacen nueve, y donde comen ocho come uno más" (37). Expanding the family went hand in hand with expanding the *abras* and developing the nation. Perhaps Dobles had heard of Alberdi's slogan because when even Espíritu Santo's spirit wanes for a moment and he thinks of his own death, he quickly recalls that "Dios no lo habría de permitir, porque él era el soporte de aquella ramazón de hijos y sentimientos. Estaba por delante continuar arrebataando a la montaña, pedazo a pedazo, más y más tierra, pues sus muchachos eran muchos y cada uno constituiría en el porvenir un matrimonio y más hijos y la multiplicación de los hombres. Urgía multiplicar los panes y los peces" (39). Of course, Dolores' contribution toward populating the *abras* extends beyond bearing and raising her own children. She also plots to strengthen the family blood line, "cuánto me gustaría un nieto que fuera hijo de Villalta" (83); so she offers her own daughter Magdalena to her neighbor Villalta and his invalid wife as a domestic servant knowing all along that Magdalena will eventually say to the object of her own teenaged desire, "¡haga conmigo lo que quiera!" (94). When Magdalena returns home, pregnant, Dolores "experimentaba una extraña y triunfante sensación de júbilo; aquello era, no la victoria de Magdalena, sino su propia victoria. Y se daba con pasión a ensoñar el bien deseado nieto" (96). As Doris Sommer makes clear, matrimony or, at least, the natural alliance of families is a necessary step toward the founding of nations.

Dobles' text, then, includes a sense of national history so necessary for the development of civil codes and a prescription for populating the country. His emphasis on the notion of family as the foundation for the nation is the justification for the recurring metaphor of trees and roots. His characters clear away the original trees of the forest in order to establish their utopian *abras*, but they replace those trees with themselves. "...con la familia, árbol que crecía, se trasladaban las costumbres, las tradiciones y los sueños" (27). The whole community, all of the original seven families, celebrate Christmas Eve together, in the home of Dolores and Espíritu Santo Vega. These pioneers who bring civilization to the wilderness find the sort of happiness which Jeremy Bentham had somehow imagined for Spanish America. They can do this on the site of the *abras* because, here, far from the capital, they are free, "Aquí la libertad nacía de la ausencia de grandes vecindarios y de autoridades" (31).

Perhaps it is not so surprising that the Costa Rican Ministry of Education would uphold Dobles' novel as an excellent source of national history and a guidebook for maintaining the sense of optimism and national pride so necessary for the eventual flowering of a Central American agricultural utopia founded upon hard work and family traditions. Unfortunately, Costa Rica's history includes chapters that are not mentioned in Dobles' novel. Or, at least, that is what Tatiana Lobo would seem to assert in her *Asalto al paradiso*.

As her title suggests, Costa Rica didn't need the axes of the Dobles' pioneers clearing away the forests and, in the process, killing all the animals and the fish, destroying the rivers and the mountains in order to transform the country into an agrarian utopia. Costa Rica was a paradise on earth when the Spanish first arrived. Dobles, for his part, recognizes the environmental consequences of the actions of Espíritu Santo Vega and the other founding fathers of his Costa Rica. Consequently, Martín Villalta, in a dialogue with Espíritu Santo about the tenuous equilibrium between man and the environment makes it very clear, "Se dejan a menudo los huesos en la tierra porque ella cobra su precio. Pero vea usted quiénes han salido perdiendo aquí a la larga: los ríos y las montañas. Ustedes los han herido con sus hachas y sus puentes; ellos han tenido que ceder terreno a los pastizales y el ganado. Los animales salvajes han debido alejarse frente a sus escopetas y cuchillos, en tanto que ustedes tienen sus casitas bien entejadas. La selva se ha venido pudriendo bajo las plantas de los hombres mientras los hombres ven crecer a sus hijos y a sus reses y saben venerar a sus difuntos. ¿Dónde estaba el peor enemigo? En ustedes mismos, los hombres; en nosotros" (72).

The action of *El sitio de las abras* takes place at the end of the 19th century and through the early part of the 20th century, up until the 1940s. Lobo's novel clearly shows that in the effort to develop a Central American agrarian utopia a natural paradise was being destroyed from the time the Spanish first arrived. The major themes of *Asalto al paradiso*, that is cultural and ethnic identity, national identity, indigenous mythology, especially the genesis myth, and of course, Spanish colonial abuse all constitute part of what Lobo understands to be a more accurate foundational fiction.

At a round table called Artists' Contributions to a National Cultural Agenda which was part of a conference on "The Voice of Artists at the End of the Millennium", Lobo precisely articulated her own contributions to that agenda. The transcription of Lobo's round table presentation was subsequently published as "Por una identidad nacional libre y autogestionaria" in a Cultural Supplement to the Sunday, San José newspaper (February

25, 2001). First she distinguished "cultural identity" from "national identity" by pointing out that individuals cannot have an impact upon their cultural identity because that is a phenomenon that is the consequence of history and the group in which the individual finds him or herself. National identity, on the other hand, is different. She says, and I quote, in my translation, "we can influence national identity because it is in itself an artificial creation: national identity is an invention of the State that begins with unifying signs like the national flag, the national hymn, the national heroes, etc." (2). Lobo continues, "In the construction of a national identity we artists, writers, intellectuals can intervene. We **should** intervene. We have been intervening" (2). Lobo's particular manner of intervention in the development of a national identity lies in the dismantling of received national myths which have been perpetuated by the State. She proposes that Costa Rican artists (writers and intellectuals) contribute to "the construction of a national culture by expanding the *tico* frontiers beyond the mountains of the Meseta, opening spaces to peripheral and marginal groups, to the Afro-Caribbean sector, to the indigenous, guanacastecan groups who, in spite of everything, still conserve cultural identities that are much more defined, richer and stronger than that of the miasmatic Central Valley" (3). [3]

Then Lobo further proposes that Costa Ricans overcome the self-satisfaction and complacency that result from their myths because these myths are "wrong and fraudulent, and have impeded the strengthening of the (national) identity" (3). [4] She details five ways to eliminate these damaging myths. Very briefly they are:

1) Break the cultural shackles created by the political parties:

2) Become conscious of racism, chauvinism, and xenophobia;

3) Unmask the falsities of the official history (or that history perpetuated by the official reading list required by the Ministry of Education) by doing a rereading of the national history. This one is particularly important as it suggests the rationale for *Assault on Paradise*. She emphasizes that Costa Rica has never been the Central American utopia they many have proclaimed; it has "never been exceptional, nor peaceful, nor democratic; like all Latin American countries, it has been subject to fraud, more or less covered-up violence, and profound economic and political inequalities" (3).

4) End the arrogance of a supposed ethnic and cultural superiority. This is another theme of the novel. And,

5) Distrust official applause because this encourages submission, not rebellion.

Of these five proposals, numbers three and four are particular relevant to *Asalto al paraíso*. Reference to what might be considered a "classical" text on the *History of Central America* illustrates the point. Hubert H. Bancroft writes, in 1883, "... the Talamancans rose in revolt, burned their churches, tore down their dwellings, and killed the friars and the soldiers, the latter but ten in number. Rebullida's head they cut off on the 28th of September 1709" (618). Bancroft continues by noting that "Lorenzo Antonio de Granda y Balbin, the governor of Costa Rica" ... "took summary vengeance on the natives". According to Bancroft, under Granda y Balbin's leadership, "The rebels were utterly routed, and their cacique was tried, sentenced, and executed as an instigator of revolt" (619). The "cacique" is not even named. The brutality of the "summary vengeance" is never mentioned. Tatiana Lobo's account presents a quite different picture. As Alvaro Quesada Soto, of the University of Costa Rica mentions in his *Historia y Narrativa en Costa Rica (1965-1999)*, "La novela, que tiene como fondo la sublevación indígena de Presbere en 1709, rompe con la visión idealizada y bucólica de la Colonia que proclamaba la historia oficial" (no p. #).

Asalto al paraíso begins with Pa-brú Presbere's theological and, almost, mystical meditation. For Presbere this was not an insurrection or an uprising, but a religious war. "Primero, dioses contra dioses. Después, soldados contra soldados" (207). Lobo's account of Presbere's execution likewise contributes to debunking the myth of the pacific or peaceful tico. Granda orders that, "Y luego que sea muerto, le sea cortado la cabeza y puesta en alto que todos la vean" (311). Of course, we soon realize that the sun carries off the soul of Presbere, "hacia el mundo más abajo donde lo espera la inmortalidad" (314). The brutality of these colonial Costa Ricans is such that the protagonist-hero of the novel, Pedro Albarán is literally sickened, "Pedro sintió una ligera náusea" (313). Pedro's reaction to Spanish/Costa Rican brutality and mistreatment of the indigenous population provokes him into sneaking over to the corral where the Talamancans are being kept prisoner until they can be divided up among the cacao growers and setting them free. He then picks up his daughter and runs off into the Costa Rican night, never to be heard from again. This seems to me a myth worth repeating.

Pedro Albarán, himself the grandson of a "recalcitrant moor" who is burned at the stake of the Inquisition (22), wants to save his daughter,

Catarina, from the fate of growing up Spanish. After all, she is the result of his union with la Muda, the mute, mystical indigenous girl. Pedro decides to raise his daughter within her mother's culture. So, he takes this initial step to lay the foundation for the genuine multicultural, multiethnic national identity that Tatiana Lobo advocates.

That is the fourth of the five ways to eliminate harmful myths, according to Lobo. Even books as new as *A Brief History of Central America* by Lynn V. Foster (2000) still perpetuate, in their own way, the myth of Costa Rican ethnic superiority. Foster writes, "Oscar Arias Sanchez is a descendant of prominent coffee growers and of the conquistador Juan Vásquez de Coronado" (177). Unfortunately, she neglects to point out as the genealogist Mauricio Meléndez Obando does in "Presencia de Africa en las familias costarricenses", one of a series of essays he has done for *La Nación*, that "Oscar Arias Sánchez, premio Nobel de la Paz y expresidente de Costa Rica, es descendiente de la mulata Ana Cardoso y el Cap. Miguel Calvo" (12). Meléndez Obando, who collaborated with Tatiana Lobo on their *Negros y Blancos: todo mezclado* (1997) concludes "Se debe reconstruir una parte de nuestra identidad 'nacional', aquella que se refiere a nuestros orígenes mixturados, a nuestras raíces pluriétnicas, para combatir el nacionalismo chovinista promovido, ..., en las últimas décadas. Se debe, entonces, reescribir la historia de nuestra génesis, dejando de lado la visión idealista y bucólica de una Costa Rica imaginaria y alejándonos de posiciones eurocentristas" (13). Curiously, Dobles' only allusion to the history of slavery in Costa Rica occurs when the narrator asserts, "La esclavitud que había era la del trabajo y las asechanzas de la montaña, pero esta servidumbre entraba en el ánimo como refrescante viento de amplitud y autoafirmación sobre la tierra" (31). Although seeming to deny that slavery ever existed in Costa Rica, Dobles does admit to the damage done to the natural environment. However, excluding the Indigenous and African contributions to Costa Rican national identity, practically denying their existence is one of the most frequent critiques other Central Americans make of Costa Ricans. Tatiana Lobo, for her part, insists on the importance to Costa Rica of recognizing that, just like other Latin American countries, Costa Rica is a multiethnic amalgam. It is not as white as it pretends to be. For her, any foundational fiction of Costa Rica must begin by recognizing the marriage of races. In Doris Sommer's words, the erotics of politics in Costa Rica was much different for Lobo than it was for Dobles.

So then, *Asalto al paraíso* by Tatiana Lobo offers a quite different version of the history of Costa Rica from than that set forth in *El sitio de las abras* by Fabian Dobles. Dobles wanted to supply a national history that would contribute to the still possible Benthamic utopia in Central America. Lobo, in critiquing the official history and foundational fiction perpetuated by the Ministry of Education as a pernicious myth, suggests that the longed for Central American paradise can never be achieved until the public mind accepts the true genesis of the country.

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² Germán Castro Caycedo puts Balboa's "discovery" in the proper context in his *El Huracán*, "Vasco Núñez de Balboa fue el primer español que tuvo la oportunidad de ver el Océano Pacífico desde América, gracias a la guía y ayuda de los indios que lo habían descubierto y bordeado y luego conocido y navegado y surcado y orazado, muchos, muchísimos años antes de que aparecieran los españoles por estas tierras" (253).

[3] In one of very few references to the Indigenous people of Costa Rica in *El sitio de las abras* one of Doble's founding fathers says about the Talamancan, "Ni siquiera conocen el castellano, ...Teniéndoles plátano y carne podrida se los mantiene contentos, ..." (47).

[4] Lobo isn't the only one to critique the Costa Rican state's agenda of perpetuating deliberately false myths about the origin of the country and its national identity. The Guatemalan literary critic, Mario Roberto Morales does the same thing in his "La Costa Rica que yo ansío (Letanía de un chapín)" which appeared in the first number of *Istmica* which was devoted to "Utopía en America Central".

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