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Foner and Martí
A Review Essay
Anne Fountain

Martí, José. *Political Parties and Elections in the United States*. Edited with introduction and notes by Philip S. Foner. Translated by Elinor Randall. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989. 149 pp.

Martí, José. *Major Poems*. Edited with introduction by Philip S. Foner. Translated by Elinor Randall. New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, Inc, 1982. 173 pp.

Martí, José. *On Art and Literature*. Edited with introduction and notes by Philip S. Foner. Translated by Elinor Randall with additional translations by Luis A. Baralt, Juan de Onís and Roslyn Held Foner. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1982. 348 pp.

Martí, José. *On Education*. Edited with introduction and notes by Philip S. Foner. Translated by Elinor Randall. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1979. 320 pp.

Martí, José. *Our America*. Edited with introduction and notes by Philip S. Foner. Translated by Elinor Randall with additional translations by Juan de Onis and Roslyn Held Foner. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1977. 448 pp.

Martí, José. *Inside the Monster*. Edited with introduction and notes by Philip S. Foner. Translated by Elinor Randall with additional translations by Luis A. Baralt, Juan de Onís, and Roslyn Held Foner. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975. 386 pp.

Political Parties and Elections in the United States, a selection of writings by Jose Martí, is the sixth in a series of works on Martí on which Philip S. Foner and Elinor Randall have collaborated as editor and translator, respectively. Since 1975 with the publication of *Inside the Monster*, Foner has presented his selections and interpretations of Martí's prose and poetry, using translations variously by Luis A. Baralt, Juan de Onís, Roslyn Held

Foner (his wife), and Elinor Randall. In each of the six volumes, but especially in the five of prose, Foner provides a closely controlled, highly guided tour through some of Marti's writings. With the general aim of expanding information in English on Cuba's national hero and premier man of letters, Foner attaches to each volume an introduction and extensive notes as well as an index to each of the first four.

In the first book, *Inside the Monster*, Foner offers an assortment of essays by Martí about the United States under headings ranging from "North American Scenes" to "The Menace of United States Imperialism." In the second, *Our America*, he emphasizes articles about Latin America and the struggle for Cuban freedom. The third is dedicated to education, including both essays and selections (including one poem) from Martí's magazine for children, *La Edad de Oro.* The fourth focuses on Martí's critical writings on art and literature, and the fifth (the most recent of the prose works) presents North American political parties and elections. A bilingual edition of poetry, *Major Poems*, features comment about Martí's life and poetry and selections from *Ismaelillo, Versos Sencillos, Versos Libres, Flores del Destierro*, and *La Edad de Oro*. Both *Major Poems* and *On Art and Literature* include chronologies of Martí's life.

At first glance this outpouring of Martí editions might seem a real bonus for both scholars and the general public. The books do, in absolute terms, increase the number of Marti works available in English, although it overstates the case to suggest, as Peter Turton does in *José Martí: Architect of Cuba's Freedom* (1986), that they supersede translations such as those of Juan de Onís in *The America of José Martí* (1953). Onís's translations are representative of the full range of Martí's essays on North American life and effectively convey a sense of Martí's style. This justly praised work is still widely available in both public and university libraries. A second fine edition of Martí's articles in translation is Luis A. Baralt's *Marti on the U.S.A.* (1966). The translations in Foner's works can be said to expand upon the Onís and Baralt translations in sheer volume, but the earlier works remain important and impartial introductions to Martí.

The prose translations by Roslyn Held Foner and Elinor Randall seem adequate, although Randall's translation of the word "entrañas" raises the question of perspective and fairness. Where this word appears in regard to the United States, for example, in a May 18, 1895, letter to Manuel Mercado (*Inside the Monster*, p. 3), it is given a negative rendering as "entrails." Where it applies to Spanish America, however, in the essay on Simón Bolívar (*Our America*, p. 108), it is translated with a positive connotation as "natures." The translations of poetry, all by Elinor Randall, are for the most part successful

although the selections from *Versos Sencillos* disappoint because they lack the rhyme and cadence so characteristic of the originals. All in all, however, the translators' work is a commendable aspect of the Foner series.

The editing, on the other hand, is seriously flawed in each of the volumes. One serious drawback to the Foner selections, introductions, and text notations is the failure to include or even to take into account pertinent facts about Martí's life and works. Foner's lack of familiarity with his subject is betrayed in many ways throughout the series. In the bilingual edition of Martí's poetry, for example, his failure to mention the translation of Martí's poems by Cecil Charles (New York, 1898) allows him to leave the impression that Elinor Randall's versions are the first to appear in English. Further, in selecting from *La Edad de Oro* the poem entitled "Los dos príncipes" (which appears in both *Major Poems* and *On Education*), he seems unaware that the Martí verses, while not strictly speaking a translation, are based on Helen Hunt Jackson's poem, "The Prince is Dead." The translation doubles back into English apparently without knowledge and certainly without mention of the original source.

Foner's considerable deficiency in knowledge of Cuba and Martí and his false assertions on Martí's work within the Cuban community in the United States are well documented (pp. 18-22) in Carlos Ripoll's book, *José Martí, the United States, and the Marxist Interpretation of Cuban History* (1984). Ripoll also notes (pp. 22-31) Foner's editorial abuses in *Inside the Monster*: the doctrinaire approach to the selection of texts and the deliberate truncating of some of the pieces selected so that works are distorted by the omissions. For example, the "article" presented by Foner with the title "The Negro Race in the U.S." is actually part of a much longer article which proffers both praise and criticism of life in the United States. Reading the Foner-selected excerpt, however, one receives a heavy dose of the negative (that is to say the shameful mistreatment of blacks in the South) and virtually no mention of Martí's admiration for acts of reconciliation which were helping the nation to heal its Civil War wounds.

A general lack of attention to detail and inadequate proofreading are additional lapses in this series. In *Political Parties and Elections in the United States* the dust cover refers to Martí's "Escenas Norteamericanos" *(sic)* while in the notes to the preface of this work, the book *José Martí: Revolutionary Democrat*, is listed (p. x) with a publication date of 1968 rather than 1986. In the introduction (p. 28) to *On Education* an Emerson fable, translated by Martí ("Cada uno a su oficio"), is rendered "Cado uno a su oficio," an error repeated in *On Art and Literature* (p. 30). The notes in the introduction to *On*

Art and Literature list (p. 29) a work by José Antonio Portuondo as *José Martí, critica literarios* rather than *José Martí, crítico literario.* In this same book (p. 31) Rubén Darío's work, *Los raros*, is called *Los Raios*. These examples are but a small sampling of the egregious mistakes which plague the Foner editions.

While the editor's carelessness, both on a large and small scale, detracts greatly from the potential usefulness of the works, most flagrant among the abuses in the Foner editions of Martí's works is their reliance on plagiarism. Major portions of Foner's introductions to *On Education* and *On Art and Literature* are lifted directly and word for word from sources which are not cited. These are not cases of academic negligence but rather of extensive academic theft, obvious and easy to document. They explain why Foner's citations in the introductions go back and forth among various Martí editions: he simply lists the edition (and page reference) given by the person whose research he has lifted. The plagiarism also negates Foner's claim that translations from Martí to be found in the introductions were done by his wife, Roslyn Held Foner. In fact, where Foner has borrowed from other writings on Martí, he has done so liberally, translations and all. Of the many examples of plagiarism, the following are illustrative:

> It was September of 1886, a cloudy morning made bright by the colorful swarms of children, with their arms full of books, flocking out of the side streets to be regimented in the public schools of New York City. Some tarried to examine the billboards of the theaters, others waited submissively in line carefully arranging their slate pencils and sponges in their pencil boxes, and still others, with stockings falling, shirts unbottoned, (*sic*) and hats lost, raced through the streets like untamed colts. The big boys sent out to bring them in returned red and panting after the chase. (Roberta Day Corbitt, "This Colossal Theater: The United States Interpreted by José Martí," Unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Kentucky, 1955, p. 130.)

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> colts. The big boys sent to bring them in returned red and panting after the fruitless chase. (*On Education*, pp. 14-15.)

In a second example of plagiarism one can see how Foner copies both comment about Martí's work and translations of the Cuban author's writing:

> In an article written in 1889 for *El Partido Liberal* Martí reviewed the book *Jonathan and His Continent* by French author-journalist Max O'Rell.[1] In this review Martí characterized O'Rell's book as largely superficial—a book of notes by an author who "never took his gloves off" and never really caught the tempo of U.S. life (XII, 151-163). But Martí reserved his sharpest criticism for O'Rell's treatment of U. S. literature. After commenting on the book's overall deficiency of superficiality, Martí said:
>
> > And nowhere is this deficiency and lightness more evident than in what the author says about literature, which consists of a short list of names, without any attempt at classification or comment and without the type of passing sentence in which it is understood that the modesty of the critic belies his considerable knowledge of the subject. By listing Whitman he thinks he's said it all; without knowing who Thoreau was he declares that North America has no writers who depict nature, and since he is ignorant of Emerson to the point of omitting the name of America's foremost poet, he assures us that the U.S. has not yet produced a transcendental genius (XII, 163).
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> (Anne Owen Fountain, "José Martí and North American Authors," Unpublished PhD dissertation, Columbia University, 1973, p. 48.)

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> In an article written in 1889 for *El Partido Liberal*, Martí reviewed the book *Jonathan and His Continent* by Max O'Rell, the pen name for the French author Paul Blouet. In his review Martí dismissed the book as a superficial view of the United States. But he reserved his sharpest criticism for the French author- journalist's treatment of literature in the United States. After commenting on the book's overall superficiality, Martí wrote:
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> considerable knowledge of the subject. By listing Whitman he thinks he's said it all; without knowing who Thoreau was he declares that North America has no writers who depict nature, and since he is ignorant of Emerson to the point of omitting the name of America's foremost poet, he assures us that the U.S. has not yet produced a transcendental genius. *(On Art and Literature,* p. 17.)

It is regrettable that Elinor Randall's translations have been made to keep company with Philip S. Foner's careless and dishonest editing, and that Martí's memory has been so ill served by this editor's hand. The book jacket on the latest of the works, *Political Parties and Elections in the United States*, quotes Carleton Beals as saying, "Anything that Philip Foner writes is worth reading for its clarity, scholarship, and honesty." Unfortunately, a careful reading of these six publications of Martí's works proves that just the opposite is true.

Note

[1] Max O'Rell—pen name for the French author Paul Blouet.

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