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RALPH WALDO EMERSON AND HELEN HUNT JACKSON IN *LA EDAD DE ORO*

By Anne Fountain*

When José Martí began publication of *La Edad de Oro* in the summer of 1889, his purpose was to inform and to entertain the "children of America." In the four issues he published (July, August, September, October) Martí's range of topics included literary classics modified for children, original poetry, versions in Spanish of two North American poems, and a commentary on the youthful beginnings of famous writers—in sum a variety of literary lessons.

While Martí is much studied and there are numerous works about *La Edad de Oro,* scant attention has been given to its selections from United States poetry: the translation of an Emerson fable, "The Mountain and the Squirrel" and an adaptation of "The Prince is Dead" by Helen Hunt Jackson. Why were the only two verse translations in *La Edad de Oro* from North American authors and why did Martí choose Emerson and Helen Hunt Jackson? This question is a good starting point for a study of the links between Emerson, Jackson, and Martí—a literary triangle formed by friendship, translation, and shared values.

To begin we must know something of Martí's connection with Emerson and Jackson prior to 1889. How and when did his interest in these two writers from Massachusetts commence? The first reference point to note is 1882, the year that Emerson died and a year which forms part of Martí's initial experience of life in the United States.

Martí's years in New York City as an "epic chronicler" of the United States in the 1880s are well-known. From 1881 to 1892 Martí described North America in articles written for a number of periodicals including *La Opinión Nacional* of Caracas (1881-1882) and *La Nación* of Buenos Aires (1882-1891) and it is chiefly against this backdrop of "North Americans" and "North American Scenes" which constitute roughly one-fifth of his literary production, that Martí's interest in American literature—including Emerson and Jackson—should be seen.

Barely a week after *The New York Tribune, The New York Times, The Mail and Express* and other metropolitan newspapers carried front-page and/or editorial coverage of the death of one of America's most noted men of letters, Martí penned a powerful essay about Emerson for the readers of the

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Venezuelan newspaper, *La Opinión Nacional.* With this May 6, 1882 essay, began a literary and spiritual bond which was to sustain Martí until his death. Over a period of years and through a variety of writing—essay, comment, letter, and translation—Martí continued the association with Emerson.[1] In his "literary testament," a letter written to his disciple, Gonzalo de Quesada, approximately a month before the martyrdom at Dos Ríos on May 19, 1895, Martí indicated that his prose works should be collected in six principal volumes, with three of the volumes to be about North America. For the two volumes about "North Americans" Martí specifically listed for inclusion his article on Emerson.[2]

In the years that followed the essay on Emerson—a work which revealed Martí's intense devotion and affinity for this subject—the bard of Concord continued to be a favorite. A "Sección Constante" column on Emerson for *La Opinión Nacional* appeared only four days after the essay and though it was more concise, more ordered, and more factual than the rhapsodic piece of May 6th, the column emphasized Emerson's importance and referred to him as a "modern Plato."[3] In the course of both the essay and the "Sección Constante" feature, Emerson's works, both prose and poetry, were profiled and salient points in his philosophy explained. In the years that followed references to Emerson appeared with frequency in Martí's writing about the United States. The Transcendentalist was noted as a friend and/or colleague in connection with Amos Bronson Alcott, Louisa May Alcott, Thoreau, Hawthorne, Longfellow, Whittier, and Whitman.[4] In his introduction to the translation of Helen Hunt Jackson's novel, *Ramona,* Martí referred to the "good sense" of her friend, Emerson.[5]

Throughout Martí's writing on Emerson, lines from the American author—both narrative and verse—were shared in translation. Many ideas, particularly from *Nature,* but from other works as well, were expressed either in paraphrased form or direct translation. For example, the familiar maxim from Emerson's "Self Reliance," To be great is to be misunderstood"[6] was conveyed by Martí: "Ser grande es no ser entendido."[7] And in an article on George Washington's Centennial Oath of Office, Martí noted "el cañonazo que dio la vuelta al mundo,"[8] the famous Emerson line from the "Concord Hymn"—"Here once embattled farmers stood/ And fired the shot heard round the world."[9]

Many of Emerson's ideas had particular appeal for Martí. Martí was very sympathetic to the idea that nature could teach man more than a book or a university, that the soul was superior to science in discovering universal truths, and that beauty in its larger sense included moral beauty (virtue), beauty of the intellect (judgment), and pure beauty (which gives delight in and of itself).[10]

Martí also appreciated Emerson's universality of spirit and his comprehensive view of humanity. These concepts, along with the Cuban author's vigorous and prolonged association with Emerson, caused Martí to find through Emerson invaluable moments of comfort, joy and reverie with nature—in the

midst of his often tumultuous, sometimes beleaguered, and intensely sacrificial effort on behalf of Cuban independence. Passages from Martí's notebooks convey this absorption with Emerson, when Martí refers to the "absolutely pure pleasure" and the supreme satisfaction that he felt in an afternoon of contemplation about Emerson.[11]

Martí undertook to translate at least five of Emerson's poems although as late as 1950 it was believed that he had translated only the one which appears in *La Edad de Oro.* Martí rendered but did not put into publishable form Spanish versions of "The World-Soul" and "Good-bye" and included portions of "The Test" and "Blight" in his assembled notes.[12]

In innumerable ways Martí's life, works, and influence parallel those of the revered model, Emerson. Each was a decisive influence and continues to be widely read today and known at least by name to those even of the most cursory literary formation. Each cultivated chiefly essay and verse and each excelled in the creation of maxims, which in their respective cultural spheres continue to be quoted. Each exerted a positive moral influence although neither was religious in a purely conventional sense.

The case of Helen Hunt Jackson is different. Martí appears to have taken major note of this North American poet and novelist when he determined to publish, in Spanish, on his own account, her 1888 novel, *Ramona,* which portrayed the mistreatment of Indians in California at the hands of North Americans.

In addition, there are several references to Helen Hunt Jackson in Martí's articles. He mentioned her authorship of *Ramona* in an 1887 letter to the Mexican newspaper, *El Partido Liberal;* noted her in connection with Whittier's eightieth birthday celebration, and compared her with some frequency to Harriet Beecher Stowe—showing in the case of the latter—how the two women had focussed attention on social ills such as slavery and injustice toward the Indians.[13]

Martí's chief treatment of Helen Hunt Jackson, however, was through translation. He translated *Ramona,* included in *La Edad de Oro* a poem based on her poem, "The Prince is Dead," and in a brief piece of writing for *La Juventud* (a New York newspaper) gave the first four lines, which are also the last four lines of the poem "The Way to Sing."[14] For *Ramona* it is possible that Martí had a personal connection of sorts with a friend of the author, Doña Mariana de Coronel. Mrs. Coronel is said to have received the very first copy of *Ramona* in 1884 from Helen Hunt Jackson's own hand. In addition Mrs. Coronel wrote that she had also received the first copy of the Spanish translation of *Ramona,* which was sent to her by the translator.[15] Martí wrote in a 1888 letter to his good friend, Manuel Mercado: "Por el correo le va por fin, el primer ejemplar de *Ramona,*[16] and no mention of Mrs. Coronel can be found in Martí's notes or lists of addresses. Thus Mrs. Coronel's claim to have been sent the first Spanish version of *Ramona* may or may not be valid. But valid or not, it is a measure of the importance that a friend of the author attached to Martí's translation.

Martí's enthusiasm for Jackson can be seen clearly in his introduction to the *Ramona* translation, where he claimed of the book: "Este libro es real, pero es bello. Las palabras relucen como joyas"[17] And in a letter to Manuel Mercado Martí said of the book: "Lo escogí, quiero decírselo, porque es un libro de México, escrito por una americana de nobilísimo corazón...'[18] Martí's letters to Manuel Mercado further reveal that Martí had a compelling interest in seeing *Ramona* succeed financially in Mexico and that he concerned himself with the details of distribution and sales.[19] It is also of significance that in Martí's notes there is a reference in English in which he calls *Ramona* a "translation in which I have put all my heart."[20]

Martí twice made reference to *A Century of Dishonor,* the 1881 Jackson work about the treatment of Indians in the United States.[21] He alluded to her friendship with Emerson,[22] and noted that just before she died Jackson had written to President Cleveland to commend him for his recognition of Indians' rights to justice and dignity.[23] All of these references point to important facets of Jackson's fame and confirm Martí's assessment of her importance. Jackson, in fact, sent *A Century of Dishonor* at her own expense to every member of Congress, was known for the fact that Emerson carried her odes in his pocket and is frequently noted for her deathbed message to Grover Cleveland.[24]

Although Helen Hunt Jackson, who also signed her work as H.H., Helen Jackson, and possibly under the pen name Saxe Holm, fares less well among critics and scholars today than she did among those who were her contemporaries, she is nonetheless an author whose work has endured. She was greatly admired not only by Emerson but also by Emily Dickinson. Ramona survives not only as a novel but in film, radio-threatre drama, and in song.[25] A Ramona Pageant, based on Jackson's work, has been held every spring since 1923 in southern California and is one of the state's most spectacular outdoor events.[26]

What did Martí find in common between Jackson and Emerson and what brought both into his favor? Here the writings of *La Edad de Oro* are illustrative.

The Emerson fable "To Each His Own" was translated by Martí under the title "Cada uno a su oficio," and follows somewhat the idea of fables such as Iriarte's "El pato y la serpiente" where a wise serpent instructs that it is best for each creature to develop his own special abilities. In the Emerson fable a humble squirrel explains to a mighty mountain that each of them—one large and magnificent and the other small and agile—has a purpose and place in the larger scheme of things, and each is worthy in his own way. Martí expresses this very succinctly in these lines:

Usted no es tan pequeña
Como yo, ni a gimnástica me enseña
Yo negar no imagino
Que es para las ardillas buen camino
Su magnífica falda:
Difieren los talentos a las veces:

Ni yo llevo los bosques a la espalda
Ni usted puede, señora cascar nueces.[27]

The poem for *La Edad de Oro* from a Helen Hunt Jackson theme has a similar message. Jackson's poem was called "The Prince is Dead" and contrasted the death of the King's son with the death of a peasant boy—each of the two stanzas ending with the line, "the prince is dead."[28] Martí enthusiastically embraced the opportunity to express through his version of the poem the concept that rich and poor were alike in facing the loss of a son and that the poor lad was no less a prince than the royal one. In Martí's adaptation the work is title "Los dos príncipes" and the two stanzas end with these respective lines:

—¡el hijo del rey se ha muerto!
¡Se le ha muerto el hijo al rey!

—¡Se quedó el pastor sin hijo!
¡murió el hijo del pastor![29]

In each of these poems published in *La Edad de Oro,* Martí found a chance to highlight principles which were representative of the authors he admired and which guided his own life as well. Both the Emerson and the Jackson poems depict the essential nobility of all of nature's facets, great and small alike, and show how important it is not to diminish the feelings expressions, and needs of the humble. This is vintage Martí and is exactly the kind of thinking he wished to instill in his young readers. Thus it is not surprising that these two authors so greatly admired by Martí should appear together in print in the pages of *La Edad de Oro.*

"Los zapaticos de rosa," the Martí classic enshrined in the hearts and memories of countless children of the Americas, delivers essentially the same message as the Emerson and Jackson poems. In this poem which also appears in *La Edad de Oro,* a rich child, Pilar, is contrasted with a poor child and the rich child reveals through the act of sharing her rose-colored slippers (and more) the understanding that each child is deserving and each one worthy in her own way. Thus in each of the major poems of *La Edad de Oro,* "Cada uno a su oficio," "Los dos príncipes," and "Los zapaticos de rosa," Martí sought to provide examples of generosity of spirit which would unite great and small, noble and plebeian, rich and poor.

Several studies in the 1980 book, *Acerca de La Edad de Oro* deal specifically with the poetry of *La Edad de Oro,* but none takes note of the thematic progression of the poems by Emerson, Jackson, and Martí. Eugenio Florit notes how in "Cada uno a su oficio," Martí utilized seven-syllable and eleven-syllable lines with rhyming couplets and how in "Los dos príncipes" he returned to the roots of traditional Castillian verse in a "romance" of oxytone lines.[30] José A. Portuondo describes how "Los dos príncipes" through its "ritmo grave y pausado" depicts death as a serene and beautiful final chapter in which the powerful and the humble are made equal.[31] And Portunondo con-

nects Martí's ballad of the two princes with the tradition of "romances" in which a succession of independent scenes such as " 'el palacio está de luto' " and " 'en los álamos del monte/ tiene su casa el pastor' " create a general impression.[32] Further Portuondo shows how successful Martí is in this poem in creating parallels—rey/reina; pastor/pastora; caballos/ ovejas; los dos hijos muertos/el laurel y la flor—which associate all of nature with man's grief.[33] José María Chacón y Calvo's article also comments on "Los dos princípes" by giving brief background notes on Helen Hunt Jackson and by showing the poem's affinity with the popular poetic folklore tradition in Spanish.[34] Juan Marinello in his short essay "Tradición y novedad en los versos de *La Edad de Oro,*" briefly discusses "Los dos príncipes," refers to points established by Florit and Chacón y Calvo, and concludes by mentioning the noble message intended through "Los zapaticos de Rosa."[35]

None of these reviews gives more than a cursory mention to Emerson and his fable in *La Edad de Oro,* and none perceives a purpose or intent on Martí's part which would comprehend both the Jackson and the Emerson works. Given Martí's special concern for the works of Emerson and Jackson, however, it seems reasonable to suggest that the choice of their poems, along with his, for *La Edad de Oro,* was one of design and purpose, rather than chance. Like links in a laurel of "good works," the progression of poems in *La Edad de Oro* can indeed be seen to represent a continuum of thought from major writers—writers joined by concern for humanity, positive response from contemporaries, and a lasting legacy in the Americas.

NOTES

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3. Martí, XVII, p. 306.
4. Fountain, pp. 77-78.
5. Martí, XXIV, p. 204.
6. Emerson, Ralph Waldo, *Complete Works,* Centenary edition, 12 vols. (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1903-1904), II, p. 58.
7. Martí, XIII, p. 30.
8. Martí, XIII, p. 503.
9. Emerson, IX, p. 158.
10. Martí, XIII, pp. 22-25.
11. Martí, XVIII, p. 288.
12. Fountain, pp. 86-87.
13. Fountain, pp. 216-217.
14. Martí, V, pp. 160-161.
15. Davis, Carlyle Channing and Alderson, William A, *The True Story of "Ramona,"* (Toronto: S.B. Gundy, 1914), pp. 189-195.
16. Martí, II, p. 129.

[17] Martí, XXIV, p. 203.

[18] Martí, XX, pp. 112-113.

[19] Martí, XX, pp. 112-146.

[20] Martí, XXII, p. 288.

[21] Martí, XXIV, p. 204 and VII, pp. 54-56.

[22] Martí, XXIV, p. 204.

[23] Martí, X, pp. 321-322.

[24] Davis and Alderson, p. 81.

[25] Fountain, p. 220.

[26] *Discover the Californias,* (Pasadena: Jim Garber & Associates for the California Department of Commerce, 1990) p. 51.

[27] Martí, XVII, p. 325.

[28] Jackson, Helen, *Poems,* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1898) pp. 24-25.

[29] Martí, XVIII, p. 372.

[30] *Acerca de La Edad de Oro,* (Selección y prólogo de Salvador Arias) (La Habana: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 1980) p. 158.

[31] *Acerca de La Edad de Oro,* p. 168.

[32] *Acerca de La Edad de Oro,* p. 176.

[33] *Acerca de La Edad de Oro,* pp. 176-177.

[34] *Acerca de La Edad de Oro,* pp. 179-184.

[35] *Acerca de La Edad de Oro,* pp. 188-191.