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NEH/University of Tampa Project 2

Feliciano Castro's *Lágrimas y Flores*, 1918

A Critical Edition and Translation

Narrative

This proposal offers to recover, translate into English, and contextualize Feliciano Castro's *Lágrimas y Flores* (1918), a 94-page book of political and romantic verse written by a journalist, lector, and publisher who lived in Galicia, Havana, Rome, Tampa, and Key West.

This project proposes to translate and contextualize this collection, integrating it into the history of Spanish-language literature written in the United States and clarifying its importance to the continuing, post-1899 political movement for full Cuban independence, which persisted among Key West's working-class Cuban community even after the Treaty of Paris. As Rhi Johnson suggests, making *Lágrimas y Flores* available in translation "will also open up new territory in the field, both humanizing this moment of political struggle and offering a vantage point into how a literary mind of the early twentieth century conceptualized the ideas of homeland, patriotism, and nostalgia, and furthermore held those concepts in dialogue with more social elements of cultural existence: love, family, and self-constructed identity."

Feliciano Castro was born in the 1890s to an impoverished farming family in Villalba, Lugo. As an adolescent, he was classically educated at a Jesuit school in Rome by his well-to-do uncle, single and childless, who had previously emigrated to Havana. At nineteen, and with hopes of joining his uncle and obtaining his support in establishing himself in business, Castro sailed to Cuba, penniless but well educated—arriving only to find his uncle deceased, and himself with no inheritance or means.

Castro relocated to Tampa, where he wrote for the Havana magazine *La Bohemia*, and from there to Key West, where he threw in his lot with working-class Cubans and the cause of Cuban independence, putting his education to good use by working as a lector, reading literature, the news, and political theory aloud to workers in cigar factories. He met Juan Pérez Rolo, who had emigrated from Havana as a boy in 1869 during the Ten Years' War and grown up to become a small-press book publisher devoted to the cause of Cuban independence who founded *Florida*, a weekly newspaper, in 1915.

On the small island of Key West, not even connected to mainland United States by rail until 1912, the two men went into business together, opening the Taller Típografico de Castro y Rolo at 421 Southard Street. Castro fell in love with Pérez Rolo's daughter, Sofia, and, writing for *La Prensa* and other newspapers of the period. In 1921, he took over the editorship of *Florida*, for which he served as director until at least 1926 (volumes 7 through 12). In his 1928 chronicle *Mis recuerdos*, Pérez Rolo describes his business partner and son-in-law as "a constant

fighter for good causes” who worked to support the Cuban exile community “with such fervor and enthusiasm as perhaps no one else has done.”

In 1918, the Taller Tipográfico released a collection of poems that Castro had published in newspapers in Tampa and Key West during 1916, 1917, and 1918—years when Europe and the United States were embroiled in World War I but when the young poet’s political attention was emphatically elsewhere: on Cuban independence, the experience of exile, and romance. Castro’s collection of poetry, *Lágrimas y Flores* (*Tears and Flowers*), is, as its title indicates, divided into two sections, and these are prefaced by a prologue and conclude with a final author’s note. The “Lágrimas” section includes 42 poems—such as “Mi Madre y mi Bandera,” “El Alma de Martí,” “El Dos de Noviembre,” “España ¡Salve, bandera mía!,” “Cuba ¡Salve, bandera amada!” and “Bodas de Plata del Centro Español de Tampa”—that engage various aspects of exile politics, whether loss and nostalgia, heroes, or political organizing in Florida. The “Flores” section, following a nineteenth-century tradition in Spanish-language literature of depicting beautiful women as flowers, includes 54 delicate and lovely poems, a few of which are familial (“A Mis Hermanas”) but most of which are addressed to and named for individual women Castro knew in Tampa and Key West: “A Celida Bravo,” “A Ofelia Rivero,” “A Sofia Perez Rolo” (whom Castro would later marry), and so on. Two of the poems are titled for sociocultural events and spaces where young men frequently encountered and interacted with young women: “En el Baile” and “En el Teatro.”

Finally, the critical introduction will investigate the strict binary suggested by the structure of the collection, to which its title draws attention. Do the poems uphold this apparent (and traditional) division between the world of men/nation/politics and the world of women/romance/culture, or is Castro doing something more complex and elusive? Is Castro simply reproducing inherited literary norms or reworking them—and, if the latter, to what end? A passionate admirer of José Martí, does Castro reproduce Martí’s incongruously inequivalent gender binary of “gentlemen” and “mothers,” or does he invent his own vision of the sexes?

Timeline and publication plan:

My tentative plan—in collaboration with translator and scholar Rhi Johnson, I hope—is to have the entirety of the manuscript translated and annotated with necessary historical explanatory notes by May, 2020, and to have drafted a critical introduction by July, 2020. We will first propose the project to the University Press of Florida, which has lines in both Florida State Studies and Latin American and Caribbean Studies, and see what feedback we receive.

A sample poem from the first page of *Lágrimas y Flores*:

El Alma de Martí

Para el Sr. Domingo Milord.

Una tarde escuchando la palmera
que cantaba y gemía acariciante,
sobre el ala del viento ví flotante
tremolar victoriosa una bandera.

Yo muy niño, quizás no comprendiera

lo que en listas de cielo ví ondeante,
ni las franjas de perla y de diamante,
ni la estrella y el triángulo siquiera.

Han pasado los años, y otro día,
al oír la palmera que gemía,
aquello que ignoraba comprendí:

Son—me dijo gentil la palma bella—
el triángulo, las franjas y la estrella
un pedazo del alma de Martí.

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