



# **Alfonso Reyes and Spain: His Dialogue with Unamuno, Valle-Inclán, Ortega y Gasset, Jiménez, and Gómez de la Serna**

*Barbara Bockus Aponte*

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Alfonso Reyes, the great humanist and man of letters of contemporary Spanish America, began his literary career just before the outbreak of the Mexican Revolution of 1910. He spearheaded the radical shift in Mexico's cultural and philosophical orientation as a leading member of the famous "Athenaeum Generation."

The crucial years of his literary formation, however, were those he spent in Spain (1914-1924). He arrived in Madrid unknown and unsure of his future. When he left, he had achieved both professional maturity and wide acclaim as a writer. This book has, as its basis, the remarkable correspondence between Reyes and some of the leading spirits of the Spanish intellectual world, covering not only his years in Spain but also later exchanges of letters.

Although Reyes always made it clear that he was a Mexican and a Spanish American, he became a full-fledged member of the closed aristocracy of Spanish literature. It was the most brilliant period in Spain's cultural history since the Golden Age, and it is richly represented here by Reyes' association with five of its most important figures: Miguel de Unamuno and Ramón del Valle-Inclán were of the great "Generation of 98"; among the younger writers were José Ortega y Gasset, essayist and philosopher; the Nobel poet Juan Ramón Jiménez; and Ramón Gómez de la Serna, a precursor of surrealism.

Alfonso Reyes maintained lifelong friendships with these men, and their exchanges of letters are of a dual significance. They reveal how the years in Spain allowed Reyes to pursue his vocation independently, thereby prompting him to seek universal values. Coincidentally, they provide a unique glimpse into the inner world of those friends—and their dreams of a new Spain.

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