

# A Scholiast's Quill



# A Scholiast's Quill:

## *New Critical Essays on Alfonso Reyes*

Edited by

Roberto Cantú

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A Scholiast's Quill: New Critical Essays on Alfonso Reyes

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In

Memory of my dear mother,

Sra. Guadalupe González De Loza

(May 2, 1925-November 28, 1997),

My first guiding light in literature



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# INTRODUCTION

ROBERTO CANTÚ

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, LOS ANGELES

*La coherencia sólo se obtiene en la punta de la pluma.*  
—Alfonso Reyes, *Parentalia* (1957).

The eleven essays, one interview, and four translated poems contained in this book have been selected through personal contact (Octavio Armand), or from papers read at the 2017 Conference on Alfonso Reyes, held at California State University, Los Angeles on April 14-15, 2017.<sup>1</sup> The included chapters--revised and expanded from their conference versions--represent the work of literary critics and theorists from Colombia, Croatia, Cuba, France, Mexico, and the United States, a fitting assembly of quills with the scholia of renowned specialists on Alfonso Reyes (Nuevo León, México, 1889-1959), frequently portrayed as Mexico's "universal" writer. Alfonso Reyes was the admired embodiment of the Latin American poet, essayist, and literary theorist during the first half of the twentieth century. The son of Bernardo Reyes, governor of Nuevo León and army general under the regime of Porfirio Díaz (1876-1911), Alfonso Reyes served México in various diplomatic posts from 1913 to 1939 in Argentina, Brazil, France, and Spain, and functioned as the President of the Mexican delegation to UNESCO after the Second World War. Reyes was the director of the Casa de España (1939), later known as Colegio de México. Through his travels and many years of diplomatic service abroad Reyes worked and corresponded with leading Mexican, Latin American, and European writers and philosophers, and translated into Spanish works by Jules Romains, G.K. Chesterton, Robert Louis Stevenson and, among others, Laurence Sterne and Homer's *Iliad*. Reyes wrote with insight and independent spirit about avant-garde movements, and with ethical force against the rising tide of Italian fascism and Nazi politics in Hitler's Germany. In modern Mexican literature, Reyes was the guiding mentor of

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<sup>1</sup> To view the conference program, visit:  
<http://alfonsoreyesatcalstatela.blogspot.com/>

younger writers, Octavio Paz and Carlos Fuentes among them, whose work can only be fully understood in the light of Alfonso Reyes' vast and varied literary creativity. While post-Revolutionary Mexico stood for a break with a national past marred by dictatorships and colonialism, Reyes sought continuity in terms of Mexico's stratified past--Mesoamerican, colonial, post-Independence, and contemporary--and a Greco-Roman humanist tradition that flourished in Mexico as of the sixteenth century. These national and classical heritages were regarded by Alfonso Reyes as founding origins for Mexico's quest toward a culture of criticism, historical change, and democratic institutions. In *El arco y la lira* (1956), Octavio Paz declared his indebtedness to Reyes for his unconditional friendship and for being a writer's model: in Reyes' essays Paz claimed to have found order, lucidity, and illumination. With an astonishing intellectual curiosity and capacity for work, Reyes thought and wrote about every important topic and major intellectual current that continue to define his beleaguered times--and ours as well.

*A Scholiast's Quill: New Critical Essays on Alfonso Reyes* aims to recover Alfonso Reyes' interdisciplinary legacy from the standpoint of the twenty-first century. It highlights Reyes' Madrid years (1914-1924); his interest in the work of philosophers (Henri Bergson), and classicists (Werner Jaeger); his essays and poetry inspired by ancient Greece; the essay form, and Reyes' ties to the Latin American and Anglo-American essayistic traditions; his correspondence with Mexican diplomats (Genaro Estrada), and historians (Carlos Pereyra); and, lastly, Reyes' writings in areas relative to his *Obras completas*, cosmopolitanism, history, and biography. As evidence of a contemporary embodiment or incarnation of Reyes' literary tradition, Octavio Armand (Cuba 1946) seals this book with an interview in which we discuss topics dear to Alfonso Reyes, such as ancient civilizations (from Greek and Persian to Mesoamerican); poetry and the prose poem; exile in its inner and geographic forms; and the cultural practices of reading and interpretation. This book is thus an international and trans-generational tribute to Alfonso Reyes, undertaken from contrasting critical methods and with different theoretical models.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> As the two-day conference came to a close--and shortly afterward in email correspondence--it was evident that the trans-generational debates and rewarding exchanges among conference panelists and speakers had brought into being new and unforeseen interpretations of Alfonso Reyes' poetry and essays. This trans-generational aspect was well articulated by Aurora Díez-Canedo in our email communications, recommending that I add "new" to the book's subtitle, thus acknowledging the conference's generational dialectic that would lead to new reading possibilities in Reyes' work. Díez-Canedo's timely suggestion brought to

This book opens with a section titled “Poetry, Philosophy, and Hellenism in Alfonso Reyes” under the banner of the lead essay by Héctor Perea, who lifts arm and hammer with a resolve to topple the “classical” Reyes (the “bronze statue”) through a study meant to liberate the Reyes of “flesh and blood” that stands for the wide-ranging *oeuvre* that bears his name. Perea’s emphasis is on Reyes’ first European exile (1913-1924), and on his passion for miniature literary projects, therefore on Reyes as a writer of contrasts: on the one hand, his vast work; on the other, his personal delight in the minuscule. Reyes said of Paul Valéry that his work is a microcosm that encompasses in miniature the entire macrocosm:<sup>3</sup> Perea makes the same claim for Reyes, and begins his aesthetic reflections with the distant memory of his first visit to the unexpectedly small *Capilla Alfonsina*; thereafter, he launches into an extended meditation on a “symbolic object”: a miniature book titled *Élégies* by the French Romantic female writer Marceline Desbordes-Valmore (1786-1859), that Reyes dedicated to his wife on 7 November 1916. Perea claims that *Élégies* turned into a symbolic object of Reyes’ writings, with the young couple on a path leading to times of adversity, and yet with Reyes refusing to dwell, much less write about such an undeserved fate. Although unspecified, the symbolic object does not point to Reyes’ (or his wife’s) belated Romantic literary preference: the possible associations between the French female poet and the Reyes couple turn instead on asynchronous matters related to Revolutions (French, Mexican), impoverishment of families, elegiac themes (orphanhood, exile), the Great War, and the Dada movement. The “Romantic” allusion, however, could well be a form of mourning: the memory of his father (“el gran romántico [...] el hombre de los destinos” [“Oración del 9 de febrero” *OC* XXIV: 34]). Following memory’s favorite route, Perea’s critical focus operates retrospectively along four fronts, first with an analysis of two of Reyes’ essays published in *Calendario* (“Motivos del ‘Laocoonte’” and “Contra el museo estático,” 1924), pieces that underscore Reyes’ humanistic, avant-garde, and technological interests. Perea studies these two essays as the convergence or unification of the arts in a minuscule but important thirteen-line “manifesto” signed

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mind Reyes’ notion of the transmission of cultural content through generations, *horizontally in space* (contemporaries) and *vertically in time* (from one generation to another): “la verdadera cultura sólo existe en cuanto aparece la transmisión de sus contenidos. Tal transmisión se opera, en el orden horizontal del espacio, por comunicación entre coetáneos, y en el orden vertical del tiempo, por tradición entre generaciones [...] ella se transforma a su vez, se desvía, se ensancha, recoge nuevas especies y abandona otras” (“Posición de América [1944],” *OC* XI: 257).

<sup>3</sup> See “Paul Valéry contempla América,” (*OC* XI: 103).

by Reyes, a writer conventionally viewed as guarded toward the *avant-garde*.<sup>4</sup> Secondly, Perea discusses *Cartones de Madrid* (1917) as the essays known for their poetic eye-witness accounts of *madrileño* life in tattered hotels, and for their sustained interest in everyday language, simplicity, even vulgarity as the flesh and blood of a *chiaroscuro* aesthetic. Third, Perea refers to Reyes' venture in 1916 into film reviews, signed jointly with Martín Luis Guzmán as *Fósforo*, publications that were a revolution and revelation of sorts in a new art form: film criticism. Fourth and last, Perea holds (following Alicia Reyes' claim) that in 1915 Reyes must have shared with Diego Rivera (while Rivera was immersed in Cubism) the unpublished draft of *Visión de Anáhuac* (1917), a chronicle-essay and compendium of facts and fantasy that taught Rivera a new way to represent reality, specifically that of ancient Mexico. This "influence," Perea argues, culminated in Rivera's vast and significant mural: "La Gran Tenochtitlan" (1945), a painter's "vision" inspired originally by Reyes' essay and left to posterity in Mexico's National Palace. Perea's essay is a multi-perspective, cubist approach (in reverse chronology) to Reyes' life and work, and to an era (1913-1924), known for a devastating world war

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<sup>4</sup> Perea's emphasis on the minuscule thirteen-line avant-garde manifesto by Reyes is meant to question the institutionalized view of Reyes as a *classical* writer (read "conservative," traditional and thus irrelevant), therefore with the implicit objective to rend and dismantle Reyes' canonized "bronze statue." An acclaimed Reyes scholar, Perea opts for the minuscule argument, but with a broader reach. To illustrate: in an essay written between the Mexican Revolution and the first years of his first European exile (1910-1915)--hence during a time frame corresponding to Perea's study--Alfonso Reyes reflected on the painful and romantic pleasures derived from the *negative* study of the mind's historical development; that is to say, not the youthful enthusiasm of the rising generation (inclined to little if any forethought, concluded Reyes), but of those sympathetic members of an older generation who, although alert to new ideals, find themselves aligned with yesterday's worldview and values. To understand such critical leaps in the history of thought, Reyes found a corrective bridge in the readings of authors such as Renan and Montaigne, associated with the interior life and the "culture of the self" ("cultura del yo"), a firm base for skepticism (see "Montaigne y la mujer" [OC, III: 171-179]). Such reflections insinuate Reyes' cautious attitudes toward the Mexican Revolution and to critical transitions in a national history (with eyes set only on the promising dawn), but also to his judgment of the emergent avant-garde movements--Cubism, Futurism--that were revolutionizing all forms of institutional art. Perea's argument would remind us that Reyes favored and embraced innovation in thought and in the arts: he kept his distance, however, from *capillas* and *escuelas* that provided artists with *recipes*, guidelines, and formulas.

and revolutions--military (Mexican, Russian) and in the arts--that led Reyes to his own emancipation as a writer.<sup>5</sup>

In her essay, Adela Pineda Franco attends to a critical tradition built upon Reyes' *Visión de Anáhuac*, with interpretations that claim it to be an "aesthetic experiment," an idealist representation of culture, a dialectical operation meant to overcome Mexico's historical contradictions or--in pictorial terms--a fresco, a mural, or a cubist painting. Pineda Franco takes a different interpretive path, namely: a re-reading of *Visión de Anáhuac* based, for the most part, on Henry Bergson's philosophy of time and intuition. Such a perception and Reyes' mode of conceiving history was shaped, according to Pineda Franco, during the years 1913-1917 by a ubiquitous technology, a rising mass culture, and optical media (e.g., cinema).<sup>6</sup> To examine the importance of Bergson's intuitive understanding of time, duration, and Reyes' famed essay, Pineda Franco points to Reyes' early writings (*Cuestiones Estéticas*, Paris, 1911), and to his conviction that the senses were the key to a fresh understanding of one's immediate world. Since *Visión de Anáhuac* was published in 1917, Pineda Franco points to the contemporaneous ties between Reyes' letter to Bergson and the essay's date of publication, positing Reyes' Bergsonian notion that "in the face of contradiction and revolution, culture should enhance continuity." Indeed, on 2 May 1917 Reyes attended a lecture by Henri Bergson hosted by the *Ateneo de Madrid*. Impressed by the French philosopher, the next day Reyes sent him a letter, discussed in detail by Pineda Franco. As Reyes recalled in 1956, such a letter resulted in a personal meeting with Bergson that lasted more than thirty minutes after a reception in his honor, held on May 8. In her methodical analysis, Pineda Franco depicts Reyes the writer as philological erudition in motion, with a narrative voice subordinated to the movement of poetic prose, thus empowering the reader to grasp the totality of a temporally fragmented

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<sup>5</sup> In *Historia monumental de mis libros*, Reyes made the following assertion: "Mi época madrileña correspondió, con rara y providencial exactitud, a mis anhelos de emancipación. Quise ser quien era, y no remolque de voluntades ajenas. Gracias a Madrid lo logré" (*OC* XXIV: 177).

<sup>6</sup> Pineda Franco's approach to Reyes' work through Bergsonian themes such as a ubiquitous technology, a single perception at a standstill, and optical media (cinema) do correspond to Reyes' ideas regarding avant-garde aesthetics and Bergson's philosophical categories of time and intuition. In Reyes' words: "Sumando varias perspectivas, varios sistemas de referencia; reduciendo unos a otros; teniendo en cuenta la relatividad de todos ellos, y su interdependencia para un ojo omnipresente que acertara a mirar el cuadro desde todos los ángulos a la vez, nos acercaremos al milagro de la comprensión" ("Pasado inmediato" *OC* XII: 182, my emphasis).

world within a single perception at a standstill.<sup>7</sup> At this point, Pineda Franco's illuminating interpretation of *Visión de Anáhuac* touches on Reyes' philosophical appropriation of Bergson's idea of time and intuition; the era's technological impact; condensed and interpreted next to a critique of Marxist thinkers such as Walter Benjamin--particularly his views on mechanical reproduction--and Hanns Eisler's writings on music and film after the horrors of World War II caused by political doctrines such as Fascism and the recovery of "ancient roots" by the Nazis. The suggestiveness of Pineda Franco's study leads the reader to collateral associations; for instance, to Czeslaw Milosz, who claimed that the one and only longing of the alienated intellectual is to belong to the masses. Alfonso Reyes was an exception in his humanist bearing and standpoint: his political ideal was to reach equality not through a downward leveling, but by an upward lift.<sup>8</sup> Among the several attainments in Pineda Franco's

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<sup>7</sup> In his 1940 prologue to Justo Sierra's *Evolución política del pueblo mexicano*, Alfonso Reyes comments on the interpretive challenges in Mexico's fragmented history and of its unified totality represented in Sierra's work. In such attempts, Reyes grants intuition a fundamental cognitive role: "La síntesis histórica es el mayor desafío a la técnica literaria. La palabra única sustituye al párrafo digresivo [...] el hallazgo artístico comunica por la intuición lo que el entendimiento solo abarcaría con largos rodeos [...] *el escritor suscita una tempestad en el tintero*" (*OC*, XII: 247, my emphasis). In the English translation of Reyes' prologue, Charles Ramsdell renders this passage as follows: "[h]istorical synthesis is the greatest challenge to literary technique. In Sierra's writing a single word takes the place of the digressive paragraph [...] The gift of artistry communicates by suggestion what would otherwise require a long roundabout explanation (1969: 10). Not quite the style and higher order thinking in Reyes' passage.

<sup>8</sup> In Reyes' words: "Consiste nuestro ideal político en igualar hacia arriba, no hacia abajo" ("Discurso por Virgilio" [1930], *OC* XI: 162). Exactly one year after the 1929 presidential defeat of José Vasconcelos, Reyes' educational mission agrees, on principle, with Vasconcelos' post-revolutionary plans for a national education. As recalled by Guillermo Sheridan, in the *Congreso de Escritores y Artistas* [Congress of Writers and Artists], held in Mexico City in 1923, José Vasconcelos proposed a cultural plan that would meet the nation's educational needs beyond the political. The first objective was--according to Sheridan, a continuation of the *Ateneo de la Juventud*--for the writer to feel duty-bound to "escribir para los muchos con el propósito constante de elevarlos" (33) ("to write for the many with the constant aim to edify them"). This congress culminated in the founding of the *Confederación de Trabajadores Intelectuales* [Confederation of Intellectual Workers], thus establishing the first corporative body that united writers and artists with the State (34). The reference to Czeslaw Milosz was taken from *The Captive Mind* (1990:8), where he adds: "The only gratification it offered came from

essay, one is salient and hence a breakthrough in Reyes studies: the reconfiguration of Reyes from a mere *belletristic* author (the style, the adroit commentator, the amateur at work in different fields), to that of a thinker, interdisciplinary writer, and educator.

Following on the themes of philosophy, culture, and education, Stanley Burstein's essay brings to light the correspondence between Alfonso Reyes and the German classical scholar Werner Jaeger. With an emphasis on Sergio Ugalde Quintana's book *Un amigo en tierras lejanas: correspondencia Alfonso Reyes/Werner Jaeger (1942-1958)*, Burstein sifts and pores through the book's forty-four letters now kept in the *Capilla Alfonsina* in Mexico City, a correspondence that is more than the history of a sincere and warm friendship: it is a tale of parallel lives marked by exile, a shared attachment to classical antiquity, and by their firm embrace of humanism during times of racial hatreds and unspeakable violence. Jaeger was arguably the most famous Greek scholar in the western world during the Second World War, with authoritative publications on Aristotle, prestigious professorships in Classics at the University of Berlin (1921-1936); the University of Chicago (1936-1939) and, as of 1939, at Harvard's Institute for Classical Studies. No less significant to Reyes, Jaeger was the author of *Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture*, a scholarly work translated into Spanish in Mexico City and one that motivated Reyes to contact Jaeger. Burstein comments on how this long-distance friendship was kept through correspondence and a characteristic custom in Reyes' relations with friends: the gifts in the form of books. Burstein notes that in 1942 Reyes mailed Jaeger a copy of his recently-released book *La crítica en la Edad Ateniense* (1941), and a copy of *Vision de Anáhuac* (1917); in 1949, he sent Jaeger a copy of *Junta de sombras* (1949) as a Christmas present; and in December 1951, a copy of his Spanish translation of the *Iliad*, inscribed to "the master of Hellenists." This long-standing correspondence began with Jaeger thinking that Reyes was a professor and classical scholar, praising Reyes' judgment on matters regarding Greek literary criticism. Burstein comments on Jaeger's initial bewilderment over Reyes' style ("the sovereign manner of the author in style and expression was somewhat surprising to me in a scholar"), followed by his discerning insight into Reyes' authority on Greek antiquity ("the scholarship of the author seems to assert itself on every page"). After further inquiry into Reyes' background, Jaeger acknowledged him as "one of those rare figures who combine the activities of a statesman with brilliance in literature and

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collective *warmth*: crowds, red faces, mouths open in a shout, marches, arms brandishing sticks; but little rational satisfaction" (8).

scholarship.” In other words--Burstein adds--Reyes was a humanist. This understanding and mutual recognition led to Jaeger’s informal and personal correspondence with Reyes, based in part on remarkable parallels in their lives in terms of their affirmation of the value of humanism inherited from the Greek and Latin traditions. Antiquity’s pedagogical legacy (implied in the Greek word “Paideia”) was, for Reyes and Jaeger, civilization’s shield and rightful defense against the inhumanity and violent barbarism of the Second World War. Jaeger’s personal letters, claims Burstein, are an invaluable background in Jaeger’s life during a critical time, turning his correspondence with Reyes into the diary he never wrote, a correspondence that illustrates the experiences and hopes of two distinguished humanists who were witnessing the dissolution of the humanist tradition that both held dear. Burstein clarifies the title of his essay: knowing that they were living through dark times, Jaeger reminded Reyes of Solon’s words: “a friend in foreign lands is one of the few gifts of life.” According to Burstein, Jaeger’s affection and admiration for his friend in a foreign land is evident throughout his correspondence with Reyes.

As a continuation on the theme of Reyes’ Hellenism, Fabián Espejel acknowledges Reyes’ time-honored fame as an exceptional master of the essay and short fiction, but laments the critical neglect of his poems, including the three milestones in twentieth century poetry penned by Reyes: *Ifigenia cruel* (*Cruel Ifigenia*, 1923); his partial translation of the *Iliad* into Spanish; and *Homero en Cuernavaca* (*Homer in Cuernavaca*, 1948-1952).<sup>9</sup> It is well-known that Reyes was not a writer who worked on one book at a time, tending instead to simultaneously focus his mind on a range of assignments and, on ancient Greece, intermittently since his early youth.<sup>10</sup> The composition of “Aristarco o anatomía de la crítica” (“Aristarchus or Anatomy of Criticism,” 1941) took place while Reyes had begun the

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<sup>9</sup> In Octavio Paz’s judgment, “*Ifigenia cruel* es una de las obras más perfectas y complejas de la poesía moderna hispanoamericana” (1996).

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Reyes’ early poems: “Termópilas,” dated June 1906; “Oda nocturna antigua,” May 1909; “La elegía de Itaca,” September 1909 (*OC X*: 19, 35-37, 41-42) and, among others, Reyes’ youthful but mature study “Las ‘tres electras’ del teatro ateniense” (dated April, 1910), as the opening essay in *Cuestiones estéticas* (1911). One should remember that *Homero en Cuernavaca* was composed in the midst of an exceptionally focused Hellenistic stage in Reyes’ life, with previous scholarly publications such as *La crítica de la edad Ateniense* (1941); *La Antigua retórica* (1942); and with concurrent and subsequent publications such as *Junta de sombras* (1949), *Estudios helénicos* (1957) and, shortly before Reyes’ death, *El triángulo egeo* (1958), and *La jornada aquea* (1959). Espejel justifiably considers Reyes to be the first modern Hellenist in Mexico.



Spanish translation of Homer's *Iliad* with a character catalogue, and the original fifteen sonnets--increasing to thirty sonnets in 1951--thematically related to Homer's epic. Espejel takes the reader through an analysis of the structure of *Homero en Cuernavaca* (three parts, ten sonnets each); probes into Reyes' theory of translation; and highlights Reyes' system of literary theory in which reading, criticism, and writing function in interesting ways. Espejel's methodical exposition leads to a close reading *Homero en Cuernavaca*, and to the humor and autobiographical "cameos" in which Reyes turns periodically into a Homeric character carrying on conversations with Pallas Athena, Agamemnon, Helen of Troy, in order (as Espejel observes) to examine, criticize, and empathize with their emotional and intellectual stands and bearings.<sup>11</sup> At the end of his analysis, Espejel contends with Sequera Meza's study of *Homero en Cuernavaca* in which the latter argues that the fundamental question in any translation of Homer must ask how to integrate the *Iliad's* historical significance and specific cultural references into Mexican modernity. Espejel challenges Sequera Mesa's historicist thesis, proposing instead that *Homero en Cuernavaca* epitomizes Reyes' integration of literature into the construction of reality, therefore as a display of how he reflects on, and examines himself, as a human being through reading and writing, thus with no reference to nationality.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Immersed as he was in Hellenic readings and research, Reyes must have felt at times as an Athenian contemporary of Plato's era, in fact his student: Aristotle. In an entertaining and informed biography of Aristotle ("Contorno de Aristóteles"), Reyes leaps back a couple of millennia for a cameo appearance as Aristotle himself--with humor, and a wink to the reader: "El maestro andaba en los cincuenta; era calvo, algo barrigudo aunque de piernas secas, de ojillos pequeños y vivaces. Vestía siempre con un cuidado ostentoso. Se arreglaba mucho la barba. Con los ademanos, lucía y hacía ver sus anillos" (*Junta de sombras*, OC XVII: 437).

<sup>12</sup> In his analysis of *Homero en Cuernavaca*, Espejel refers to the ambiguity of meanings in Reyes' *recreación* (understood as "recreation" and "re-creation," thus as sheer amusement and leisurely pastime, and simultaneously as "recreating" by means of a translation), hence in a Reyes-like combination of *burlas y veras*. The unstated argument, however, harks back to an old question: did Reyes read Homer in a Greek original? Or did he base his translation on available renditions of Homer in Spanish, English, and French versions? Juan Antonio Ayala quotes Reyes' admission that he did not read Homer's language, and only "deciphered it" (126, my emphasis). In "Discurso por Virgilio," however, Reyes documents the aversion of Porfirian liberals and positivists toward the humanities, and regrets not having been taught Latin, and one can only assume that the liberal dislike of classical languages included Greek as well (OC XI: 158). The lack of Latin or Greek when

The second part of this book, “Alfonso Reyes and the Essay,” opens with a ground-breaking piece by Ignacio M. Sánchez Prado who writes about the rich and ungraspable scope of Reyes’ *oeuvre*, and the resultant misreadings and misunderstandings of Reyes’ writings due to the manner in which, in spite of first-rate critical approaches, Reyes has managed to short-circuit the clichés and commonplaces of Mexican literary historiography.<sup>13</sup> Sánchez Prado’s aim is to rethink theoretically Reyes’ writing premises, and to propose new coordinates for the reading of Reyes’ literary forms across his work, from the viewpoints of a contemporary Latin Americanist thinking and the aesthetics of literary form, but from the margins of the theories of literature produced by Reyes.<sup>14</sup> Sánchez Prado’s critical plan is threefold: first, to engage Reyes’

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translating, for instance, either Homer or Virgil, appears to be a kept-secret among translators who oftentimes depend on previous translations themselves. In a recent English translation of Euripides’ *Bakkhai*, Reginald Gibbons admits to the impossibility of such a task (37) for the following reasons: (1) the language of classical drama did not correspond to the language of everyday life; (2) “there is so much about ancient Greece that we do not know” (35); besides, Greek ancient word meanings have been erased by centuries of “extraneous meanings” and associations from other civilizations, from Roman to modern times. As a result, Gibbons has relied on Greek editions and translations by classicists such as Richard Seaford, Stephen Espocito, William Arrowsmith, “and others” (33). Interestingly, Peter Burian and Alan Shapiro, the editors of *The Greek Tragedy in New Translations* (Oxford University Press), admit that “scholars may, it is true, produce useful and perceptive versions,” however Greek tragedians such as Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides “can only be properly rendered by translators who are themselves poets” (v). Juan Antonio Ayaya, therefore, was right: Reyes’ partial translation of Homer’s *Iliad* is distinguished by something that transcends the mere transfer and translation from one language to another: it is a creative act of appropriation that Reyes, as a translator, made in his native language of a strange element that had been conceived by a culture radically foreign (126).

<sup>13</sup> For a similar gambit, see James Willis Robb’s keen and authoritative essay (1979:13).

<sup>14</sup> An avid reader of theory and a prolific Alphonsine scholar, Sánchez Prado’s analytical method is one of negation and critique, liberally displayed during the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of Reyes’ death (2009) in five propositions made in the opening section of his book *Intermitencias americanistas* (2012). The last piece in this quincunx of essays is titled “Renovar a Reyes: cuatro intervenciones contracaránicas” in which Sánchez Prado addresses the obstacles to innovative criticism of Reyes’ *oeuvre* posed by the *marble statue*, erected by a canonical exegetical tradition that obscures more so than illuminates Reyes’ writings. Sánchez Prado’s manifesto-like call is to reread Reyes from the perspective of texts traditionally ignored or marginally read by critics so as to

writing from the perspectives of contemporary theories of literature; second, to emphasize the dialogue between recent theories with Reyes' literary forms, thus not limited to Reyes' contemporaries; third, and for practical purposes, to analyze Reyes' *Visión de Anáhuac* (1917), an essay that most readers of Reyes have read and, as such, will allow for a better grasp of the theoretical ideas that Sánchez Prado intends to develop and put forward. The lines of inquiry into the essay as a genre lead to major theoreticians, such as Georg Lukács (form and content); Theodore Adorno (the essay's negation to system and "anachronism" as its contemporary relevance in any attempt to recover historical "totality"); Slavoj Žižek (the Absolute as a "presupposition of the finite subject"); Jacques Rancière (Ralph Waldo Emerson's idea of the poet and exemplary individuals); Sebastián Pineda Buitrago (the essay form in Latin America and its

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uncover a "radical aparato de ideas que han resistido la normalización crítica" (95). Furthermore, he cautions against the first temptation to which most Reyes' readers succumb: namely, to monumentalize Reyes as a classical polymath; instead, he adopts Margo Glantz's view of Reyes' work as a *miscelánea* due to its diversity and capacity to create frames of reference in which conflict and discursive registers are parleyed and temporarily (as determined by the force of an inner insatiable dialectic) reconciled. The second temptation: to confuse the will to "demonumentalize" Reyes with an Oedipal necessity to kill the father. Third temptation: to place one's attention on Reyes' essays that have been amply discussed, such as *Visión de Anáhuac* (1917), an essay that has attracted the attention of generations of critics due to their "nationalist agendas" (97). On this point one must note that the possibility of a "nationalist agenda" is a projection of Reyes' critics, not a position that defines Reyes in his life or in his writings. Reyes was critical of Mexican nationalists, as textually demonstrated in his 1932 polemic, and considered them contrary to his idea of America, and to the critical vision of the writer as an heir of an ancient and heterogeneous heritage that contains three vital sources: the Greek (its philosophy and arts); the Hebrew (its religious genius); and the Roman (its political and juridical legacy). These three legacies reached the shores of the New World, according to Reyes, as a place of integration and fulfillment (*Cf.* Reyes, *Estudios helénicos*, OC XVIII: 23). In other words, this threefold legacy endows America, in Reyes' view, with its true historical meaning. As Reyes often observed, such cultural ideals did not inspire nationalists in post-Revolutionary Mexico, preferring folklore, the picturesque, the *jicarismo*, and the *mezquindad crítica* that Reyes had to contend with during most of his lifetime. Looking back in time to his own literary apprenticeship, Carlos Fuentes acknowledged Reyes' as his guiding light to his own life as a writer: "To be a writer in Mexico in the fifties, you had to be with Alfonso Reyes and with Octavio Paz in the assertion that Mexico was not an isolated, virginal province but very much a part of the human race and its cultural tradition; we were all, for good or evil, contemporary with all men and women" (1988: 23).

tension between liberal and conservative impulses); and, among other theoreticians, Víctor Barrera Enderle (Reyes' desire to locate himself in the Spanish literary field, on modern authorial practices such as journalism, and the examination of the past from a modern standpoint). In his proposed reading of *Visión de Anáhuac*, Sánchez Prado critically engages studies by Sheldon Penn, Andrés Zamora, and Werner Hamacher; after instructive and engaging polemical encounters, Sánchez Prado emphasizes the importance of the relationship between philology and the historical past in the Alphonosine literary form, specifically in *Visión de Anáhuac*. Philology--he claims--unlocks from the historical text not only the "potentiality of speech," but also a potentiality of history immanent to the archive of texts that the essay form seeks to unfold in its critical intervention. Viewed from this perspective, *Visión de Anáhuac* is not only an image or a philosophical representation of Reyes' "community," but also a narrative entity thoroughly constructed through textual mediation. An unstated but implicit and previously untested aim in Sánchez Prado's essay--hence its underling importance--is the inclusion of Alfonso Reyes the theorist at the center of modern literary theory, from Adorno to Žižek.

Víctor Barrera Enderle's book chapter stems from two models of literary historiography that he has developed in relation to Alfonso Reyes and the Latin American essay. He calls his conceptual framework the *Alfonsino essayistic discourse*, and he claims that it gives access to a form of thought that selects, appropriates, and reinvents the heterogeneous legacy of Western culture. Barrera Enderle's order of presentation begins with a biographical sketch of Alfonso Reyes, his early formation as a poet, essayist, and humanist with a precocious maturity as a writer, manifested in youthful essays such as "El procedimiento ideológico de Stéphane Mallarmé" (1909), "El paisaje en la poesía mexicana del siglo XIX" (1911) and, among other early publications, "Las "Nuevas noches árabes" de Stevenson" (1912), with Reyes' evident inclination toward world literature and the mastery of world languages associated with poetry and prose. This initial creative phase in Reyes' formation as a poet and essayist ends in 1913 with the death of his father, General Bernardo Reyes, marking the beginning of Reyes' first European exile until Reyes' return to Mexico in 1939, incidents in Reyes' biography described by Barrera Enderle in detail. Beyond the biographical emphasis, Barrera Enderle interlaces the historical crisis that shaped Reyes' formation as a writer, underlining the profound social changes in Mexico under the Porfirio Díaz regime (1876-1911); the years of insurgent combat (1910-1917); the Great War (1914-1918); and the ensuing years of European right-wing violence and irreversible transformations in Mexico. As Barrera Enderle observes,

neither Reyes nor the country would be the same again. Out of the mishaps and catastrophes that shaped the era's historical process, a new intellectual emerged in Latin America: the professional writer. At this point, Barrera Enderle begins to develop in parallel tracks the historiography of the Latin American essay from the nineteenth to the twentieth century, thus from the earliest phase of foundational national reflections to new modes of thinking the colonial and the national that would explain emergent ways of articulating the modernization of Latin American countries through the discourse of democracy and cultural identity. With Reyes' return to Mexico in 1939, the *Alfonsino* essay reaches its final stage with the expression of two themes that distinguish this illuminating moment before darkness sets in 1959: first, Reyes' reflections on literary theory and criticism; second, Reyes' meticulous attention to his *Obras completas*.<sup>15</sup> In regards to the historiography of the Latin American essay and its modern transformations, Barrera Enderle refers to the publication of Octavio Paz's *El laberinto de la soledad* (1950) as the essay that ended the discussion on national identity, turning one's attention to Mexican history in its connection to the world, specifically during the readjustment of political priorities caused by the Cold War, and the particularities of new urban phenomena. These changes, claims Barrera Enderle, had a strong impact on the Latin American essay and on the profile of the essayist, who soon gave way to the specialist and the academician, resulting in a steady weakening of the ties between the essay and the social. In relation to Alfonso Reyes: this final stage is one in which Reyes became a "classic man," irrelevant and thus unread. According to Carlos Monsiváis, Reyes' *Obras completas* are the great mausoleum where his writings rest. Born in Nuevo León (like Reyes), and with important books on his eminent predecessor, Barrera Enderle states that his generation, well represented in *A Scholiast's Quill*, are writing essays on Latin America, looking for ways to understand and interact with their diverse and contradictory realities in which Alfonso Reyes--always the welcome mentor--is both an inspiration and a contemporary.

In his "Historia documental de mis libros," Reyes summarized a sequence of tasks in his life as a writer living in Spain during and after the years of the Great War: first in line "independent" works that he wrote for his own "esparcimiento" (recreation, leisure), followed by commissioned writings in criticism and erudition (OC XXIV: 236). Part of the work that brought sustenance to his family were his translations from English

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<sup>15</sup> I would add a third theme: Reyes' emergence as a Hellenist in full form through important books that range from *La crítica de la edad ateniense* (1941), and *Junta de sombras* (1949), to *La jornada aquea* (1959), among other related titles.

originals (Chesterton, Sterne, and his highly-esteemed Stevenson). Writing on Reyes' Spanish translations from English originals, Sebastián Pineda Buitrago opens his essay with a reference to Octavio Paz who claimed in 1966 that the English tradition of poetic prose had been introduced by Reyes to the modern poetry in Spanish language. Pineda Buitrago's intent is to consider Reyes as the counterpart in the Spanish-speaking world of the Anglo-American essayistic tradition that ranges from Edward Gibbon and Thomas Carlyle, to Ralph Waldo Emerson, William James, and G.K. Chesterton. The message is clear: Reyes transcended the levels of commissioned work, internalizing the finest of other literary traditions and, at the same time, cross-fertilizing the literature of the Spanish-reading world. Pineda Buitrago guides the reader through the journalism published by Reyes in the Madrid newspaper *El Sol* during and immediately after the Great war, with articles on Dr. Johnson, Addison, Swift, and Defoe, later collected in a book titled *Mesas de plomo* (Lead Tables, 1918). Pineda Buitrago notes that Reyes's journalism led to a new and broader concept of the journalistic essay, informal in tone, satirical at times and in good British mode, with his characteristic good humor, and frequently brief. As such, Reyes' essays--mostly columns and articles--succeeded where erudite articles didn't: Reyes was personal and familiar in style, carefully weaving a sociable intimacy with his readers. After the Great War, however, this kind of essay was considered by the English-reading public as outmoded, *genteel* or light, with a preference for more politicized essays. The crisis in the tradition of the essay, as Pineda Buitrago remarks, gave way to new post-war offshoots and variants. It is at this juncture that Pineda Buitrago follows the trajectories of Reyes as an essayist along with that of the Hungarian literary critic Georg Lukács, with the former opting for the Pragmatic way of thinking, and the latter for the Marxist philosophical tradition. Reyes' leap into a new way of thinking and writing is examined by Pineda Buitrago in a flashback to Reyes' troubled but close attachment to his father, General Bernardo Reyes, who was opposed to his son's choice of a writer's life, a trial by fire that created in the young Reyes the self-discipline and determination that would be the driving force during his first exile. According to Pineda Buitrago, Reyes' father was the personal embodiment of nineteenth century liberalism and republicanism, political views that inspired Reyes with a sense of responsibility to the nation and to a personal ethical conduct based on pragmatism. But this is only a preface to Pineda Buitrago's main purpose: he takes the reader through the nuances of pragmatism and casuistry; through an analysis of Reyes' *El Suicida* (1917); and to its conscious and unconscious associations with *Orthodoxy* (1909), and the novel *The Man Who Was Thursday* (1908), two

books by G.K. Chesterton that Reyes translated into Spanish. Punctual historical convergences occur in 1917, the year when *El suicida* was published: according to Pineda Buitrago, it was precisely in 1917 that Albert Einstein split the atom in multiple particles, and the avant-garde artists splintered the literary form of traditional genres. Adding to the exceptionality of this year, Pineda Buitrago holds that Reyes' collection of fictional/critical essays released under the title *El suicida* is his most philosophical book. In his conclusion, Pineda Buitrago clarifies that his method is one of tracking mental processes so as to observe closely the spectacle of a powerful, sovereign intellect (Reyes), translating itself amid a complex group of conditions. Prior to this concluding clarification, Pineda Buitrago seems to tease and challenge his reader in a Reyes-like manner (personal and familiar in style, carefully weaving a sociable intimacy with his reader) with assertions that will no doubt spark critical responses (e.g., Reyes' literary production from his first book to his last was "very scattered even disorderly"), or will perplex Reyes' readers: take, for instance, Pineda Buitrago's questions: was Reyes a right-wing supporter of the famous Catholic and French right-wing group *L' Action Française*, whose intellectual leader was Charles Maurras? Pineda Buitrago argues that between 1918 and 1919 Reyes published several articles in the Madrid newspaper *El Sol*, supporting the Maurras' national conservative cause in the middle of the Great War.<sup>16</sup> Pineda Buitrago concludes with a fable: the alleged differences between the hedgehog and the fox. The point is to guess or consider if Reyes is one or the other. The hedgehog knows one big think, whereas the fox roams, zigzags, and pursues many ends; the former thinks and feels a single, universal organizing principle; the latter sniffs and follows *no moral or aesthetic principle* (my emphasis). Pineda Buitrago claims that Reyes is a fox--however, in response one asks if Reyes rightfully fits into this "rigged"

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<sup>16</sup> In his book *Aquellos días* (1917-1920), Reyes included a section of essays titled "Desde Francia" in which Charles Maurras appears frequently, and regularly satirized as well. In the essay "Los monárquicos de Francia," Reyes sculpts a profile of Maurras with an evident festive sarcasm as a gesture of his political differences with the right-wing leader: "A la cabeza del movimiento, como definidor teologal, está el admirable Charles Maurras, uno de los hombres que mejor han escrito la lengua de Racine; penetrante crítico literario y autor de sugestivas síntesis y estudios sociales donde, *por desgracia*, se nota siempre la desviación causada por la idea fija. Tras un acucioso examen de dos o tres males de la mentalidad moderna francesa, propone un remedio: ¿qué remedio? ¡La monarquía!" (OC, III: 396). Regarding Reyes' left-wing preferences, see "Historia documental de mis libros" (OC XXIV: 254).

fable in which he appears to be pulled by no moral or aesthetic principles. No doubt Pineda Buitrago means to be unorthodox à la Chesterton, thus to confound and perplex, satirical at times but with characteristic good humor, carefully weaving a provoking intimacy with his readers.

Through his travels and many years of diplomatic service abroad, Reyes worked and corresponded with leading Latin American and European writers and philosophers, such as José Ortega y Gasset (Spain), Jorge Luis Borges (Argentina), and Werner Jaeger (Germany), to name a few. In the opening essay of Part Three, titled “Alfonso Reyes’ Epistolary Archive,” Florence Olivier studies the correspondence between Reyes and Genaro Estrada (Sinaloa, 1887-1937) as the record of a friendship carried from 1916 until 1937, the year of Estrada’s untimely death. The distinguishing feature that separates this correspondence from others kept by Reyes over the years is, according to Olivier, its double containment of official and private missives between the two diplomats and humanists, with the latter signed as “Reserved” or “Personal and Confidential.” Reyes asked that his correspondence with Estrada be archived for at least two decades after his death (1959), and so it was shelved for many years in the *Capilla Alfonsina* in Mexico City. The correspondence, titled *Con leal franqueza*, was edited by the late French scholar Serge Ivan Zaitzeff, and released in three volumes (El Colegio Nacional, 1992-1994). In her thorough study of this correspondence, Olivier analyses the temporal span and important incidents that strengthened their friendship and affection. The possibility of such a friendship was based on their belief in personal integrity, with Estrada relying on Reyes’ judgment on literary matters, and Reyes on Estrada’s sound assessment of questions related to Mexican diplomatic and cultural affairs. On personal concerns, Reyes disclosed to Estrada his feelings of disquiet and doubt, as well as his moments of playful humor and private jokes. The epistolary exchange between these two friends is closely examined according to a unified vision of Reyes life and work during the years 1927-1937, encompassing the diplomat, the writer, and the person. According to Olivier, the diplomatic work of both Reyes and Estrada was an attempt to represent Mexico abroad in the best possible light and in the face of intrigues, lack of sufficient financial support, and political events in Mexico that embassies had to explain, such as the Cristero Rebellion (1926-1928) that Reyes, as Mexico’s ambassador in Argentina, had to defend when facing an anti-Mexican Government demonstration led by Argentina’s Catholic Youth (*Juventudes Católicas*). On occasions, adds Olivier, Reyes’ political analysis is lucid and insightful, as illustrated in Reyes’ comments on the role played by attaché workers (*agregados obreros*) in Mexican embassies, working on behalf of



Soviet interests.<sup>17</sup> These personnel, mostly of rural origin, secretive and ideologically-driven, would send the results of their espionage through Mexico's Communist Party, with reports reaching Moscow before their delivery in Mexico City.<sup>18</sup> Olivier casts her attention on Reyes' literary and intellectual inclinations, different from the national cultural project begun under the presidencies of Alvaro Obregón (1920-1924) and Plutarco Elías Calles (1924-1928), with nationalist tendencies that would shape and determine post-revolutionary Mexican culture for decades to come. José Vasconcelos, the head of Mexico's *Secretaría de Educación Pública* (1921-1924), tried to convince Reyes to join him in the educational reconstruction of post-Revolutionary Mexico, but Reyes declined due to his Mexicanist vision known for its broad internationalist scope, later expressed with grace and intelligence in his essay "Discurso por Virgilio" (1931). This essay, as Olivier remarks, became a central piece in the aggressive 1932 polemic between nationalists and the avant-garde members of the literary journal *Contemporáneos* (1928-1931), with the former demanding a "virile" literature that expressed the "soul" of Mexico, and the latter condemned as cosmopolitan, reactionary, and "effeminate" writers distanced from national realities. Alfonso Reyes became the guiding mentor of this journal and the *Contemporáneos* generation, and

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<sup>17</sup> In a character semblance of the party members, and of Diego Rivera during his initial years as a member of the Communist Party of Mexico, Bertram Wolfe writes: "In a party as backward and inexperienced as the Mexican, made up of unskilled intellectuals and newly proletarianized peasants possessed of peasant minds, the impressiveness of his [Rivera's] personality, the ease with which he commanded authority in any meeting he attended, the verisimilitude of his rich flow of words and images and his skill at coordination of details into a unified picture [...] he could sense things, build up out of the merest fragments with the aid of extraordinary powers of 'composition' a complete, self-consistent, internally logical, overwhelmingly convincing picture [...] When anyone challenged, the fertile mind of the painter would be stirred to bring forth from within himself fresh 'proofs,' new details more convincing than before" (227). These are the party members that were sent to Mexican legations and embassies abroad to spy and keep Moscow updated, as Alfonso Reyes suspected.

<sup>18</sup> In his glasnost-era biography of Trotsky, the Russian historian Dmitri Volkogonov narrates how Stalin planted spies in Trotsky's and in his son Lev's households (334-336); how Stalin received on his desk Trotsky's manuscripts before their publication (370), and the manner in which Stalin disseminated misinformation through the Communist Party in Mexico against Trotsky, and the manner in which David Alfaro Siqueiros was brought into the plan to assassinate Trotsky, with the Mexican muralist described as not knowing the whole truth, "or could not utter it" (449).

Genaro Estrada turned Mecenas, funding the journal from 1929 until its last issue in 1931.<sup>19</sup> Through the correspondence exchanged during these

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<sup>19</sup> For a prefatory study and anthology of essays relative to this literary and cultural polemic, see Guillermo Sheridan, *México en 1932: La polémica nacionalista* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1999). The attacks on Reyes were not limited to his lifetime; in his book *Tiros en el concierto* (1997), the literary critic Christopher Domínguez Michael inherits the ire and vile of the 1932 polemic and has this to say about Reyes' essay "Discurso por Virgilio": "El estilo es declamatorio y demagógico, y sus intenciones, burocráticas [...] es el platillo que Reyes sacó de su cocina para el banquete nacionalista y estatolatra de los años treinta; es su escasa y por fortuna presincible contribución a esa ideología de la Revolución que le fue, venturosa y químicamente, ajena" (qtd. Sheridan, 51). This is the flip side of "canonized" Reyes: it is Reyes facing the cannon. How does Sheridan respond to such a calculated misreading of Reyes' essay and intent? He writes: "A mi también me irrita la ambigüedad de Reyes, enfermo de diplomacia, y que solo en su correspondencia (ni siquiera en su *Diario*) externase su verdadera opinión sobre 'las ruindades del nacionalismo' y sobre la forma en que se le había lacerado con esas acusaciones" (52). There is no ambiguity: Sheridan forgets that Reyes, in his long letter *A vuelta de correo* (30 May 1932), did in fact respond intelligently and in honorable self-defense to Héctor Pérez Martínez' unjustified criticism of Reyes (7 May 1932). There is also no ambiguity in Reyes' views on "nationalism": reading Reyes' mock-interview (there is no interviewer, only the interviewee: Reyes ["Entrevista en torno a lo mexicano," *OC* XXII: 195-196]), it is clear that Reyes draws a distinction between "nationalism" and patriotism, and the differences between his attackers of 1932 ("ingratos amigos de mi propia generación"), and the philosophical group *Hiperión* whose members recognized the "Mexicanidad" in Reyes' writings. In their capacity as university-trained philosophers, and living during a different time in Mexico (1950s), Leopoldo Zea and the *Hiperión* group were appreciative of Reyes' "cosmopolitanism." As Sheridan admits, the self-appointed "masculine" and nationalist writers were posturing their ideology in the hope of obtaining employment in the government, hence the ambition and resentment of their defamatory attacks against members of the *Contemporáneos* generation, two of which committed suicide (Xavier Villaurrutia [1950], and Jorge Cuesta [1942]). Tellingly, Sheridan comments on the "real" reason behind the 1932 polemic in a chapter titled "Chamba y biología" (60-63). Indeed, the "nationalists" only wanted the State-sponsored posts held by members of the *Contemporáneos* generation. According to Sheridan, the "nationalists" were granted the positions they coveted (105-107). In the end, one must remember that Reyes was not psychologically working for the State; he labored for his ideal of Mexico and Mexicans, dignified and personified by his father's memory: "tan provechosa para mi sincero afán de aprendiz de hombre y de aprendiz de mexicano (¡porque he conocido tan pocos hombres y entre éstos, tan pocos mexicanos!" ["Oración del 9 de febrero," *OC* XXIV: 29-30])."

years, Olivier points to moments in which Reyes the person emerges full-blown, assuming at the time of writing that the correspondence was confidential and limited to his close friend, thus the frankness and its revelatory impact. Alluding to Machiavelli, Reyes paraphrases one letter sent by the former to his close friend Francesco Vettori, arguing that eminent men are made of immense contradictions, pulled by their heart toward austere honesty and to the contemplation of big questions, suddenly giving the impression of being drawn to lust, inconstancy, and vanity. In *Las vísperas de España* (1937), Reyes would restate this passage in his nimble and polished style: “Los orígenes de muchas cosas bellas son cenagosos” (*OC* II: 245).

A writer of ecumenical reading interests and a celebrated craftsman of the written word, Reyes was also gifted with a talent for friendship, oftentimes kept in decades-long correspondence with a wide array of friends and fellow authors. The essay by Aurora Díez-Canedo addresses an exception: Reyes' ultimately strained correspondence with Carlos Pereyra (Saltillo, 1871-Madrid-1942), Mexican historian, diplomat, and Reyes' former teacher who temporarily lived under Reyes' shelter during the latter's days of penury in Spain. Díez-Canedo's interest, however, is not necessarily limited to Reyes' distaste and irritation toward Pereyra, eighteen years older and with the coarse and upfront manners of the stereotypical Northern Mexican: instead, she concentrates her attention on Mexican writers abroad after the Mexican Revolution; on their divergent political differences (pro-Porfirio Díaz, supporters of Victoriano Huerta, or of Victoriano Carranza, and so forth); on their sudden unemployment from Mexican legations or embassies in Europe due to government changes back home; and on Reyes' political self-profile in his expressed aversions to some Mexican émigrés, such as the pro-Huerta Pereyra (Reyes is quoted as saying “¡[Pereyra] es tan huertista, tan furiosa y decididamente huertista!”). The importance of Díez-Canedo's essay thus rests on at least three levels: one, Pereyra's correspondence with Reyes has never been published; second, her focus is on Pereyra (a forgotten historian), and on his inexhaustible intellectual energy and copious publications; third, on the political conflicts among Mexican émigrés who lived through changing political times, particularly the emerging European political currents stemming from the Great War, and the rise of totalitarian politics such as Fascism, Bolshevism, and Nazism. Pereyra was soon drawn to Alfred Richard Orage's “New Age” politics, with its avant-garde journal *The New Age* as the forum for George Bernard Shaw's Fabian Society. The result was Pereyra's entry into a whirl of new politics that took him from his denunciation and reproof of the brazen thievery of post-revolutionary

governments in Mexico, to socialism and right wing politics, clear antecedents of Pereyra's later position against the Spanish Republic and his support of Francisco Franco's fascist politics. As Díez-Canedo indicates, the correspondence between Pereyra and Reyes (1914-1933) consists of forty-six letters by the former and only one by the latter (marking the breakup of the friendship), dated 10 August 1931. This correspondence has been permanently archived at the *Capilla Alfonsina* in Mexico City, to which Díez-Canedo was granted access. The correspondence begins on 17 July 1914 after Pereyra's dismissal from the Mexican Legation in Brussels, and shortly after Victoriano Huerta's defeat in June 1914 (Battle of Zacatecas), followed by his exile and Venustiano Carranza's gradual consolidation of power in Mexico (1917). The long sweep of the Reyes/Pereyra correspondence is divided into two phases: the first, as Mexican exiles who join quills and projects from 1914-1916; the second, from 1924-1933, marked by personal differences and their final estrangement. As Díez-Canedo states, in stark contrast with Reyes' substantial number of specialists and corresponding studies on his life and work, Pereyra's intellectual life and publications have received little or no attention. To make matters worse, Pereyra's *Obras completas* are incomplete, therefore making a thorough evaluation of his writings almost impossible. Pereyra's fascist politics--take, for instance, his support of Victoriano Huerta after the assassination of Francisco Madero (1913), and his backing of Francisco Franco during the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939)--might be reasons for an absence of scholarly sources. Known as the prototype of Mexico's conservative thinker, Pereyra cultivated journalism, and the history of Mexico, from the Conquest to the Reform, Revolution, and contemporary (political and economic) Mexico, with publications also on Russia and on U.S. figures such as James Monroe and Woodrow Wilson. Pereyra's *Historia de la América española* (1920) appeared in eight volumes, a testament to his intellectual reach, mental vigor, and ability to work on different book projects simultaneously. As Díez-Canedo notes, Pereyra's Hispanism can be construed as a Latin American "anti-Imperialist" position in response to U.S. interests, increasing meddling, and periodic occupation of Latin American countries. In view of the close partnership between President Plutarco Elías Calles (1924-1928) and U.S. economic investments in Latin America, Pereyra wrote a book titled *México falsificado* in which he criticizes the Mexican Revolution and Calles himself as a "régimen de sangre en el interior y de abyección internacional." Given Reyes' acknowledgment and interest in Pereyra's authoritative historical background on the Conquest and Colonial Mexico, Díez-Canedo brings into her discussion Alvaro Matute's intriguing

hypothesis: namely, that Reyes' and Pereyra's early joint work might have given Reyes the historical background that he was looking for in his quest to find the true voice of Hispanic America, one that reached a high point in Reyes' *Visión de Anáhuac* (1917). As a premise to this argument, one learns that from the beginning of their shared living quarters in 1914, Pereyra asked Reyes to proofread his manuscripts and to improve his style ("raje, taje, quite y ponga"), further proposing that both write a book on Bernal Díaz del Castillo. In closing, Díez-Canedo affirms that between Reyes and Pereyra the stimulus and inspiration were reciprocal--in spite of their political differences--and thus worthy of further research and study.

Part four, "Biography, History, and Cosmopolitanism in Alfonso Reyes" is headed by Fernando Curiel Defossé with a meaningful reflection on literary history (e.g., the pendular swing from literary systems based on order and tradition, suddenly hatching movements of disobedience and breaks), and its exemplary contradictions (e.g., Nietzsche and Sollers, known for being anti-canonical, and yet some things under the heavens were, in their view, necessary, indispensable, quintessential). Curiel Defossé encourages the reader to think of Art and Life--let's say, of Alfonso Reyes--as a relation known for contradictory complexities that do not have to fit into your Theory. He begins with a memory (of himself, of Alfonso Reyes, of la *Capilla Alfonsina*) dating back to a thousand and one days ago, during a more youthful time, with an emphasis on the years 1939-1959--in other words, from Reyes' return to Mexico to the year of his death. He proceeds with a kaleidoscope-summary of Reyes' life in relation to his family, his literary friends, the many travels, the romantic heart-breaks, and the Great Universe that opens its maw as of Reyes' early years: namely, the project of his *Obras completas*, from which to gaze simultaneously into all directions of human creativity and culture. A decade or so after Reyes' death--adds Curiel Defossé--a worse death fell on Reyes: French Theory dictated (and academics obeyed and followed) the death of the author, of the fictional character, of nationality, of gender, of identity, and--among other *Verboten* topics--of the "meaning" of literature. How could one enter into Reyes' world under such a mandate, Curiel Defossé asks.<sup>20</sup> Pacing next to the current electronic fascination with the Self--Facebook, Twitter, and the "Selfie"--Curiel Defossé

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<sup>20</sup> In the "Justificación" to *Romances sordos*, Alfonso Reyes affirms that there is no distinction between his life and his writings, adopting Goethe's claim that his entire work is composed of fragments that constitute an overall confession (*OC*, X: 463). Guillermo de Torre takes note of this reference to Goethe in relation to life and totality of vision in Reyes' *Obras completas*, and writes: "Continuidad que no quiere decir repetición, sino escalamiento sucesivo de metas" (1996: 71).

perceives a revived interest in a higher order Culture of the Self in autobiographies, in writings that carry significant meanings for an arresting era and, closer to Curiel Defossé's concern, on intellectual history and on Alfonso Reyes, who practiced the art of the "self" throughout his life by means of diaries, autobiographical essays, memoirs, epistolary correspondence, and one major achievement: *Historia documental de mis libros* (1955-1959), a late publication that regrettably only covers the years 1914-1924. Reyes' autobiographical task ("la Literatura del Yo") is infrequent in Mexico, a fact that Curiel Defossé takes as his Archimedean point in the second half of his essay in which he calls for a "total" biographical project on Reyes.<sup>21</sup> To undertake such a project, Curiel Defossé recommends the calm, skills, and ingenuity of a deep sea diver with *pies de plomo*, so as to reach as far as possible into the work of Alfonso Reyes, an exceptional figure and a writer of the noblest lineage, and yet contradictorily defined by the luminous as well as by shadows. Curiel Defossé acknowledges the significant labors of two editors of Reyes' *Obras completas* who have made Reyes' "total biography" possible: Ernesto Mejía Sánchez and José Luis Martínez.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> In his intellectual biography of José Ortega y Gasset, Rockwell Gray expresses a similar regret in Spaniards' personal reticence and discrete constraint to requests for access to personal and intimate details, a deeply and widely held attitude which, in his view, "has discouraged the development of a tradition of biography and autobiography comparable to that of the English-speaking world (xi). In his life-long attention to "narratives of the self," Reyes was exceptional as well as an exception within Mexican culture, features that turn Curiel Defossé's total biographical project on Reyes' life and work all that more significant.

<sup>22</sup> Knowing of Reyes' life-long readings of Montaigne (and of his homage, or "duo authorship," with Montaigne in *Tren de ondas* [1932], with the epigraphs posted at the end of each essay), let's take, for instance, Desan's biographical method as an initial step toward new interpretations of Reyes' life and work. In his biography of Montaigne, Philippe Desan raises questions addressed to "Montaignologists" that, as he anticipates, will be taken as chipping away at the "pedestal on which Montaigne has stood" for the past two hundred years. Desan's demystifying chisel is a critical method meant to rewrite Montaigne; a bust cast in marble in the image of the progenitor of the essay who, according to established tradition, nobly withdrew from the world to cultivate the self. "'My goal'--Desan clarifies--"is not to praise his [Montaigne's] judgment or to make him an author in quest of freedom, but rather to evaluate the way in which the writing and publication of the *Essays* where the result of more worldly concerns and intentions" (xviii). There are two conventional paths--writes Desan-- that lead to the analysis of a writer's life in connection to a literary *oeuvre*. The first is psychological, with the interpretive focus on the writer's character, personality, affections, and feelings. The second approach privileges *biographical* incidents that allegedly determine the