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## Tightening the Circle: Alfonso Reyes' Project to Form a Pan-American *Intelligentsia*

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Alfonso Reyes' plan to form a Pan-American intellectual elite contains an esoteric element. As Reyes introduces key poetic words and literary texts to convey the mysticism and arcane knowledge that he believes emanated from the American continent, he configures an obscure dimension that resonates within the community of intellectuals that he seeks to organize. By tracing Reyes' affinities with other Latin American and European intellectuals regarding his cultural project, and by addressing how these are inscribed in his historical context, this paper sheds new light on the operations Reyes assigned to a Pan-American *intelligentsia* that would guide the development of contemporary society.

**Key words:** Alfonso Reyes, esoteric thought, militant humanists, mystical union, Pan-American intellectual elite, Rodó.

El plan de Alfonso Reyes para la formación de una *intelligentsia* panamericana contiene un elemento esotérico. Reyes configura una oscura dimensión, la cual resuena dentro de la comunidad de intelectuales que busca organizar, a medida que introduce palabras poéticas y textos literarios claves para transmitir el misticismo y conocimiento arcano que él piensa emanan del continente. Al rastrear sus afinidades con intelectuales latinoamericanos y europeos acerca de su proyecto cultural, y al analizar como se inscriben en su contexto histórico, este artículo arroja una nueva luz sobre las operaciones que Reyes le asigna a la *intelligentsia* panamericana que guiaría el desarrollo de las sociedades contemporáneas.

**Palabras clave:** Alfonso Reyes, elite intelectual panamericana, humanistas militantes, pensamiento esotérico, Rodó, unión mística.

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By the beginning of the 1930s, Alfonso Reyes' plan to form an intellectual elite had assumed a Pan-American scope. His cultural project was based on the strategic positioning of an exclusive circle of Latin American intellectuals who, perceiving the rising shadow of totalitarian regimes and the eruption of the masses into the political arena as imminent threats, closed ranks to strengthen their own cultural, ideological, and political program.<sup>1</sup> Reyes participated in dialogues with Waldo Frank, Pedro Henríquez Ureña, and Victoria Ocampo, conversations in which José Ortega y Gasset also took part, among other intellectuals, regarding the formation of a Pan-American intelligentsia that could carry out this cultural project.<sup>2</sup> Throughout his entire life, during his years in France and Spain, as

1. In 1936, Reyes detailed this endeavor in his presentation "Notas sobre la inteligencia americana" in the context of the *Septième Entretien de l'Organisation de Coopération Intellectuelle de la Société des Nations*, which took place in Buenos Aires in September 1936. His earlier article, "Un paso de América," first published in his journal, *Monterrey*, in October 1930, and then republished by *Sur*'s editorial board for the journal's first issue in 1931, anticipated the contents of his presentation. Celina Manzoni points out that the concept of "inteligencia" in Reyes' presentation derives from the original Russian concept of intelligentsia. Manzoni, 2005, 14.

2. In 1906, young intellectuals Alfonso Reyes and Dominican writer Henríquez Ureña forged an intellectual kinship when they collaborated in Mexico City on the journal *Savia Moderna*. Ureña became Reyes' mentor, a relationship that lasted until the former died in 1946 in Argentina, where he was a professor at the University of Buenos Aires and at La Plata University (see Rangel Guerra, 1991, 26–51). Monsiváis has pointed out that the origins of Reyes' intellectual communal projects and his utopian visions for the continent are rooted in his friendship with Ureña (1989, 108). After the beginning of the World War I and the fall of Huerta's government in 1914 under Venustiano Carranza, his government suppressed all Mexican diplomatic representation abroad (Reyes had held the position of secretary of the Mexican delegation in Paris), and he was forced to move to Spain, where he met José Ortega y Gasset, the editor of influential newspapers and journals such as *Revista de Occidente* (see Alicia Reyes, 1976, 98). During his ten years in Spain, Reyes earned his living principally through journalism, and his work for Ortega invested him with tremendous intellectual authority. However, Ortega's paternal yet ambiguous relationship with Reyes ended in 1947, when he made bitter comments about Reyes. In spite of this, Reyes preserved an intellectual affinity with Ortega (Aponte, 1966, 36–43), who advised the writer and editor Victoria Ocampo on her project of founding the journal *Sur* in 1931 and, following that, a publishing house. North American writer Waldo Frank and Argentinean editor and writer Eduardo Mallea conceived this project of founding a journal and told Ocampo that she should lead it (Ocampo, 1966, 1–13). In 1927, Reyes arrived in Buenos Aires as Mexican ambassador to Argentina, where he met Ocampo and became fond of her. He also met Frank, one of the prominent intellectuals whom Ocampo had invited to Buenos Aires. Rose Corral points out that Reyes also actively participated in the formation of *Sur*, as a member of the international board, precisely because it expressed the same cosmopolitan principles he himself promoted (2006, 191–195). In the conclusion of this article, I will address the

Mexican ambassador to Argentina and Brazil, and upon his return to Mexico in 1939, Reyes not only facilitated the circulation of his ideas on both sides of the Atlantic, but also propagated this program, becoming a cultural agent and acting as an interface among various intellectual elites.<sup>3</sup>

In light of Reyes' intellectual endeavor and its sociological effects on the formation of a Pan-American intelligentsia, in this paper I draw attention to a crucial aspect of his work that has received little attention. I posit that Reyes' hermeneutic approach to various sources of knowledge intensified an esoteric dimension in his thought that resonated within the structure of the group of intellectuals in which he participated and helped to shape. These sources of knowledge are: Ancient Greek and Roman literature, Spanish culture and literature, and pre-Hispanic culture and poetry.<sup>4</sup> I demonstrate that Reyes believed that the enigmatic density of key poetic words and literary texts could convey the mysticism and arcane knowledge that he believed emanated from the American continent itself. In his work, Reyes developed an exhaustive analysis of these particular words and texts. However, at the same time, he did not clearly illuminate the elusive dimension that he sensed in them; rather, he encoded in his literary and intellectual work secret meanings of these words and texts.<sup>5</sup>

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question of the extent that *Sur* actually embodied and materialized Reyes' Pan-American cultural project.

3. Robert Conn claims that Reyes sought to organize a community of intellectuals inspired by the "Classical Weimar," the German Enlightenment and the humanism of Goethe and Schiller, to provide the guidelines for the new political regime that was arising after the Mexican Revolution (2002, 14). Gareth Williams has traced Reyes' intention to create literary institutions that would provide an opportunity both for the enlightened bourgeoisie to find self-fulfillment and to collectively generate a cultural and ideological hegemony. Williams asserts that when Reyes returned to Mexico in 1939 his goal was to link a closed circle of intellectuals with political decision-making power by claiming the role of master for the intellectuals (2012, 24).

4. Conn has also drawn attention to the performativity of Reyes' project, as he argues that what lies at the foundation of his project to form an exclusive community of intellectuals is philology. Using this approach, Conn claims that Reyes planned to found a community of artists and intellectuals under the umbrella of educational and literary institutions. But, he asserts, rather than creating a common space for intellectual debate, what Reyes actually established were "complex cultural hierarchies subordinating historical events and literary and intellectual movements and figures" (ibid, 15).

5. One of the few scholars to have drawn attention to an esoteric dimension in Reyes' work is Andrés Zamora. He asserts that for Reyes, the word of the intellectual could function as thaumaturgy, which for Reyes meant that words could provoke transcendental forces to shape themselves into actions. Furthermore, he points out

This study sheds light on the esoteric dimension in Reyes' thought first emerging in his early essays. Then it examines the genealogy of authors who influenced Reyes' work to trace the original lines of thought that he developed to introduce a mystical element in his writings. Through analyzing Reyes' early texts this study also explains his own understanding of mysticism, and the narrative strategies that he used to convey the numinous creative energy that the continent inspired in him. Furthermore, it discusses how these strategies resonated in the climate of Reyes' own time. I argue that as Reyes projected his ideal vision of America by articulating a mystical perception of the continent within his own secular thought and proposed that intellectuals could in this way provide men of action with guidelines for materializing these ideas, the elusive dimension already present in his early essays reemerges in his later work. Finally, by tracing Reyes' affinities with other Latin American and European intellectuals regarding his cultural project, I show that these connections materialized in a Pan-American intellectual network.

### **Re-capturing the American Being**

Reyes encouraged Latin American intellectuals to create a new cultural synthesis that did not imply passive acceptance of the European culture imposed on them. On the contrary, he advocated a new and audacious cultural operation: a selective and creative appropriation of the European culture's legacy.<sup>6</sup> By appropriating European cultural instruments to reflect on Latin America and going beyond European thought's limits to apprehend the nuances of the region, Reyes believed that the *inteligencia americana* could conceive an autochthonous knowledge that would give birth to a new utopian vision of their continent. Breathing the air of the Latin American cities, comprehending the social phenomena that were configured by such a unique space, Latin American intellectuals could recodify the European influence on themselves and on the concepts they used in order to create new artistic expressions

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that Reyes believed that the words of intellectuals should aspire to exert a guiding role and to prescribe a program of action within their immediate historical contexts. See Zamora 1996 and 2016.

6. Amelia Barili points out that inspired by Reyes' work, Angel Rama has called this appropriation "transculturation" (1999, 145). Roberto Hozven argues that Reyes highlights the necessity of provoking a creative dialectical resistance in which the native signifiers used by the *inteligencia americana* to understand the distinctive characteristics of the continent are opposed to the foreign interpretations imposed on these signifiers (1989, 805).

and conceptual constellations, to carry out an actual intervention in their historical context, and to lay the foundation for a cultural re-foundation of the continent.<sup>7</sup>

For Reyes, there was a latent utopian current running through the veins of Latin America, encrypted in deep layers of its past, which he believed still defined it. It was crucial for the Latin American intellectual elite to perceive this current in order to give it new power. He thought about what remained invisible as if it were an ideal landscape fed by a mystical stream, akin to utopian European visions of the pre-Hispanic world, but this time the visions did not advocate a romantic regression into the past. Reyes promoted this utopian vision as a new horizon toward which intellectuals should gaze in order to understand the originality of the American being. In order to apprehend what had remained invisible—buried in the Latin American past and overshadowed by European narratives—they should cultivate an intuitive perception of the mysticism and arcane knowledge that the continent embodied and express their awareness through a new narrative and poetic experience. In the following pages, I will support this hypothesis with an analysis of Reyes' early essay "Visión de Anáhuac (1519)" (1915) and his later work "El presagio de América" (1941).<sup>8</sup>

In "Visión de Anáhuac (1519)" Reyes had already explored this intuitive perception of an arcane knowledge encrypted in the continent's past, which nourishes his narrative. In this early essay, he situates the source of a numinous force that still defines the

7. In his essay *Calibán*, Roberto Fernández Retamar asserts that the moment that Reyes had prophesied for the cultural re-foundation of America arrived in 1959 with the advent of the Cuban Revolution. He claims that Reyes' cultural re-foundation is only achievable through a revolution. He writes: "Nuestra cultura es—y sólo puede ser—hija de la revolución, de nuestro multiseccular rechazo a todos los colonialismos; nuestra cultura, al igual que toda cultura, requiere como primera condición nuestra propia existencia" (1979, 63).

8. Reyes' vision of a latent utopian seed encrypted within the continent waiting to be discovered is a recurrent theme in his essays about America. For instance, in "Utopías americanas," after addressing actual historical attempts in Paraguay and Mexico to found utopian communities during the colonial period, Reyes claims that these events have remained buried in the past. Thus, he concludes: "¿Quién ha dicho que América ha sido descubierta?" (1938, 16). I argue that for Reyes intellectuals needed to transcend what had been already said about the continent—mainly through European narratives—and focus on seeing what had been excluded from the current visible scenario. In this sense, Hozven writes that, according to Reyes: "[...] para comprender América, la "fantasma" y no la *ya* sabida, hay que interpretarla en sus tendencias latentes, en sus configuraciones inéditas; y esto nos aboca a su núcleo definidor: la utopía" (1989, 810–811).

American being in: the pre-Hispanic past of the Valley of Mexico; the surrounding natural landscape; and the natives' poetry and cosmogony.<sup>9</sup> Reyes opens his poetic essay with a complex attempt to re-signify the American being. He first evokes European utopian visions projected on the continent. His narration reaches the New World by relating several European chronicles of the Indies. Next, the narration's point of view shifts so that we perceive through European eyes their first glimpse of the Valley of Mexico. As if Reyes were one of the conquistadores, he assumes the first-person plural, and his words mingle with those of European chroniclers to depict the vegetation of Anáhuac. Nonetheless, as Reyes guides his readers on their walk into the city with the conquistadores, he delineates a zone of non-understanding for the newcomers, which the natives create by talking secretly around them.

This is a breaking point in the essay; Reyes leaves behind the Europeans' narrative once they have reached the limits of their understanding. Then, going beyond the limits of European thought, he introduces his own autochthonous knowledge of the pre-Hispanic past. He depicts various artistic expressions and points out the major role that nature played in the natives' lives and art. He writes about flowers symbolically represented in hieroglyphics and focuses particular attention on the natives' poetry that uses the valley itself as its main motif. Reyes acknowledges that the natives' poetry was irredeemably lost through the dubious translations made by Spaniards missionaries who could have not understood the ritual implications of the poems they translated. However, Reyes asserts that it is still possible to recover authentic traces of the original poems; as if there were secrets encrypted in the words that had not vanished.

Reyes analyzes two Nahuatl poems.<sup>10</sup> He argues that the first poem has an allegoric meaning taking the valley's nature as its main motif and that the poet's inspiration comes from the landscape. He asserts that the surrounding world seems to the poet akin to a profound garden, and that the poem depicts the poet descending into the depths of the valley as if he were looking for the secret of nature itself, which he finally discovers by lying on a bed of flowers. The poet would like to disappear into these flowers, but he is alone and there will be no joy in his discovery if it is not possible to share it

9. Ignacio Sánchez Prado asserts that Reyes' utopian vision for the continent has its foundational moment in this essay (2012, 53).

10. For a discussion of the uses and orthography of Nahuatl, see Miguel León-Portilla, "Lengua y cultura Nahuatl," in *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos* 2004, 20(2): 221–230.

with others. Hence, he goes back to the surface looking for his people, noble friends and children walking across the valley, to share the secret of his joy. The poet seems to derive from the heart of the valley the secret that constitutes both the origin and the destiny of his community.

The second poem is related to the Quetzalcóatl cycle, which Reyes explains is one of the most important in the Nahua cosmogony. Quetzalcóatl is a symbol of a civilization that has been lost. He was a prophet and, at the same time, a solar myth. Reyes interprets the Nahua poem as a tearful eulogy to the disappearance of this hero. He asserts that it is similar to European eulogies to Persephone, Adonis, or Tammuz. Hence, Reyes draws a parallel between different cultural expressions that each preserves its own specific characteristics.<sup>11</sup> The eulogy presents a sad sentiment in its remembrance of a hero, similar to the Europeans' eulogies. Nevertheless, Reyes points out that in the Nahua poem the return of the hero is uncertain and perhaps will never occur; it would have been a return that could have altered the bloody tradition of human sacrifice that the Aztecs imposed on the region.

Reyes invokes the return of Quetzalcóatl as representative of the arcane knowledge that can still emanate from pre-Hispanic culture. He recuperates the legend of the lost hero to restore this utopian vision, as he does with the first Nahua poem, which seems to convey a secret encrypted in the Valley of Mexico. What are the connections between these poetic images from the pre-Hispanic culture and cosmogony and the ideal vision that Reyes imagined for the continent's present and future? If there is an intersection between the two or a dialectical relationship, he does not mention it explicitly and it remains a secret ciphered in his essay. He only suggests that it is necessary to undertake a pilgrimage towards the Valley of Mexico's past to recuperate the natives' own ideal vision, but he implies that this journey should have as its goal the conception of a new utopian vision of Latin America's future.

For these reasons, Tamara Williams claims that Reyes' essay should be read as a postcolonial text that reveals the inability of the author to actually represent the "other," the Indigenous people, or to include them in the national project he imagines for Mexico's future.<sup>12</sup> Williams asserts that the essay's fragmented attempt to

11. Jorge Luis Borges, in a short article published after Reyes' death, writes: "la memoria de Alfonso Reyes [...] era virtualmente infinita y le permitía el descubrimiento de secretas y remotas afinidades, como si todo lo escuchado o lo leído estuviera presente, en una suerte de mágica eternidad" (1950, 2).

recuperate the pre-Hispanic past does not only challenge the Positivists' linear perspective on Mexican history, but also that it demonstrates Reyes' own ideological inability to articulate in the national imaginary the Indigenous "other."<sup>13</sup> First, she introduces a letter that Reyes wrote in 1922 to Antonio Mediz Bolio, a writer, politician, and expert on Mayan culture and language, in which he clarifies the aim of his essay.<sup>14</sup> Second, Williams points out the strong resonance between Reyes' essay and Ernest Renan's writing to address Reyes' appropriation of the Pre-Hispanic past.<sup>15</sup>

Williams points out that Reyes was following the example of Renan, who stressed that oblivion and historical misappropriations of the past are justified in a nation-building process, and believed that to narrate the foundation of a nation would entail a creative operation in which reality and imagination were entwined.<sup>16</sup> Thus, Williams claims that Reyes articulates in his essay both historical facts and a mythological perception of the Pre-Hispanic past. In his letter to Mediz Bolio, he explains that his aim in *Visión de Anáhuac* was: "[...] descubrir la misión del hombre mexicano en la tierra interrogando pertinazmente en todos los fantasmas y las piedras de nuestras tumbas y nuestros monumentos. Un pueblo se salva cuando logra vislumbrar el mensaje que ha traído al mundo" (421–422). But Reyes does not solve this conundrum: How would it be possible to invoke the ghosts and arcane knowledge encrypted in pre-Hispanic monuments and to derive from these sources a mission that people could carry out in the present-day world?

In his letter to Mediz Bolio, Reyes acknowledges the devastation left behind by the colonial period and the inhuman conditions in which Indigenous people have been forced to live. However, Williams concludes that as Reyes perceived himself as a visionary capable of deciphering secrets encrypted in the past and of investing them with purpose, he assumed the position of a poet/oracle who offered a mythological contemplation of historical facts.<sup>17</sup> Thus,

12. 2014.

13. 20014, 153. Magdalena Perkowska-Álvarez claims that Reyes' essay demonstrates his engagement with the concrete historical and political Mexican scenario circa the Mexican Revolution in 1910. She asserts that Reyes' poetic essay's fragmentary form embodies the spirit of *El Ateneo de la Juventud*, the group of young intellectuals founded by Reyes, among others, who challenged the Positivists' perspective on Mexican history, which predominated during the *Porfiriato* (2001, 86).

14. 2014, 152. See Reyes, 1956<sup>a</sup>.

15. 2014, 155. See Reyes, 1956<sup>b</sup>.

16. 2014, 155.

17. 2014, 155.

according to Williams, Reyes fails to imagine in his narrative a national project capable of integrating the Indigenous people or of addressing the obliteration of the pre-Hispanic past and culture that has tragically shaped Mexico's present.<sup>18</sup>

According to Gareth Williams, Reyes' project embodied a paternalistic view that aimed to create a new historical subject grounded on bourgeois and humanist precepts. In this sense, he writes, "[I]n order to do this Reyes insists on the relation between his masters and the power of education, which he always takes in its Latin-Romanic sense: as *ex ducere*; to lead something out of the darkness into the light of day in order to be seized."<sup>19</sup> As demonstrated above by Tamara Williams, Reyes claimed the authority to master exclusive sources of knowledge, which he derived from his hermeneutic approach to the pre-Hispanic past and culture, to illuminate a path for the development of a new subject in society. But in assuming this position he neglected the historical subject who had emerged in the Revolution. Additionally, he encoded in his hermeneutic approach the actual ideal vision that he projected for the present and future of this new subject.

Thus, I concur with both T. Williams' criticism of Reyes' ambivalent ideological position and with G. Williams when he points out that what is missing in Reyes' thought is "the history of the forcible entry of the masses into the realm of sovereignty."<sup>20</sup> Nonetheless, in order to understand Reyes' hermeneutic approach to alternative sources of knowledge, it is crucial to first trace the genealogy of authors who impacted his thought, particularly José Enrique Rodó. This line of analysis allows me to explain the themes Reyes derived from this writer that helped him develop his ideal vision for Latin America and why he believed this vision could spur people to action in the material world.

### Mysticism and Vitalism

In his essay entitled "Rodó" (1917), Reyes explains the crucial influence that Rodó's work had on his own writing, and on the work

18. 2014, 175–176. Yvetter Jiménez de Báez explains the omission of "the other" in Reyes' essay in a different manner, as she writes: "Para leer la 'Visión de Anahuac' hay que tener presente uno de los conceptos teóricos que Reyes recuerda siempre a su lector: el reverso del libro (envés de tapiz, reverso del párrafo, de la metáfora). Es decir, lo negado es omitido en el primer plano discursivo, pero lo sustenta y explica creando la tensión necesaria al dinamismo interno del texto" (1989, 468).

19. 2012, 36–37.

20. 2012, 43.

of his generation of intellectuals, particularly their project to create a new intellectual elite that could foster a Pan-American brotherhood.<sup>21</sup> After reading Rodó, Reyes writes: “[L]a fraternidad americana no debe ser más que una realidad espiritual, entendida e impulsada de pocos, y comunicada de ahí a las gentes como una descarga de viento: como un *alma*” (134–135). Through Rodó’s texts, Reyes came to believe that a select minority of intellectuals could be the only ones to understand the spiritual values that must guide society at large. He also came to think that the transmutation of abstract values into the actual world was a quasi-mystical experience. Thus, as Reyes alludes to *Diálogo de bronce y mármol*, in which Rodó expressed his idea of a common human soul, he asks: “¿[Q]ué árabe le enseñó el secreto de la gracia insinuante? ¿Qué místico de oro le enseñó—filósofo práctico—a sorprender las pisadas inefables del Dios entre los trabajos y los días humildes?” (136–137). In order to find answers to these questions and to analyze how an exclusive group of intellectuals could provoke the materialization of higher spiritual values, I revisit Rodó’s most influential book, *Ariel*, and trace lines of thought that Reyes derived from it.<sup>22</sup>

Prospero, the old and admired teacher in Rodó’s *Ariel*, who is so called by his students after the wizard in Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, is delivering a lecture during the last class of the year. In this lecture, he discusses the symbolic tension between Ariel and Caliban in Shakespeare’s play and the necessity that the combined forces of

21. Emir Rodríguez Monegal points out that the work of the Uruguayan intellectual, journalist, and politician José Enrique Rodó (1871–1917) represents one of the highest peaks in the history of Hispanic literature. Rodríguez Monegal asserts that through his books *Ariel* (1900), *Motivos de Proteo* (1909), and *Liberalismo y Jacobinismo* (1909), among others, Rodó became a magisterial figure for the next generation of Hispanic intellectuals and provided them with a model of the intellectual that they aspired to emulate (see Rodríguez Monegal, 1967). *El Ateneo de la Juventud* (1909–1912), the group of young intellectuals formed by Reyes, José Vasconcelos, Pedro Henríquez Ureña, and Antonio Caso, among others, who before the Revolution, challenged the traditional educational institutions of the Porfirian regime, had an intellectual kinship to Rodó’s work. They introduced his work in Mexico for the first time, and they actually published an edition of *Ariel* in 1908. Alfonso García Morales explains that for the group of young intellectuals *Ariel* was “la expresión americana del renacimiento idealista contemporáneo; la representación y la justificación de la vida intelectual a la que aspiraban” (1992, 122). In one of the lectures that Henríquez Ureña delivered about Rodó at the time, he says that *Ariel* was “la más poderosa inspiración de ideal y de esfuerzo dirigida a la juventud de nuestra América” (Antonio Caso et al. 1962, 356–357).

22. See Rodó, *Ariel*, 1967.

reason and the noble spirit, which characterize Ariel, must overcome the violence and low instincts that characterize Caliban in the spiritual development of Latin America's youth.<sup>23</sup> In the third chapter of Rodó's book, Prospero states that each individual must preserve within himself (sic.) an inner freedom under any material conditions, even if he is subjugated to slavery, and that this inner dimension must remain to be a safe refuge for reasoning and other noble sentiments. He finds a symbol for the soul's structure in an old story about a hospitable King. Prospero tells his students that this king's charity was so immense that he opened his palace to whoever needed him.

The king's palace was the house of the people; its entry had never been guarded. But in the depths of the palace, isolated from the noise in the passageways and hidden from vulgar eyes, there was a secret hall that no one was allowed to enter—only the king himself. Prospero recounts to his students that in this space the king dreamed and freed himself from the actual, legendary king, turning his vision inward and submerging himself in profound meditation. Prospero also says that after the dead arrive to tell the king that he himself has merely been a guest in the palace, the impenetrable room remained closed and mute forever: “[N]adie la profanó jamás, porque nadie hubiera osado poner la planta irreverente allí donde el viejo rey quiso estar solo con sus sueños y aislado en la *última Tule* de su alma” [italics added].<sup>24</sup> It has not been possible to discover the precise source of the king story that Rodó introduces in his book *Ariel*. Nevertheless, I will demonstrate that it is crucial to explore the full meaning of the parable about the hospitable king to understand how Reyes, through his reading of Rodó's work, came to believe that an intellectual elite could apprehend the highest spiritual values. I will then discuss how in this parable is cyphered a key to understanding the ideal vision that Reyes projected for the continent.

Roberto González Echevarría suggests that the closest source for the parable about the hospitable king is Santa Teresa's book *Las moradas del castillo interior*, in which she introduces the metaphor of the castle to help us understand the nature of our souls.<sup>25</sup>

23. See Rodó, *Ariel*, 1967, 206–207. See Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, 2013.

24. 1967, 216.

25. Santa Teresa de Jesús, also known as Saint Teresa of Ávila (1515–1582), was a Spanish mystic and religious woman of the Roman Catholic Church. She originated the Carmelite Reform in 1552 and founded the order of Discalced Carmelite Nuns, which emphasized the austerity and contemplative character of the religious life. She

González Echevarría asserts that the castle structure represents “an elaborate inner architecture that the Spanish mystic possibly drew from Arabic sources.”<sup>26</sup> In any case, González Echevarría is not focused on this textual connection, but rather on how Rodó’s essay mirrors the *modernista* ideology of Latin American literature. Ottmar Ette, on the other hand, has explored this textual connection in depth, and claims that there are intertextualities between *Ariel* and Spanish mystic texts.<sup>27</sup> It is important to remember that Prospero alludes to Spanish mystics at the beginning of his lecture, when he mentions their “versos de marfil” and again when he links these stanzas to Jean-Marie Guyau’s parable.<sup>28</sup> Prospero argues that this parable compares humanity’s hope to achieve its ideals with an anxious bride awaiting her fiancé’s arrival. He adds that when the populace has lost the ideal for which it yearns, it is youth’s responsibility to provoke a renewal of this vision: “[C]uya imagen, dulce y radiosa como en los versos de marfil de los místicos, basta para la animación y el contento de la vida.”<sup>29</sup>

In Santa Teresa’s book *Las moradas del castillo interior*, the arrival of the mystic bridegroom is not subject to human will. Santa Teresa believes that it is not through intellectual experience that the mystic union with God can be envisioned and accomplished, but rather it is perceived by the soul and achieved in mystical experience. Thus, Ette argues that the mystic union will always remain uncertain, just as the ideal vision that Prospero projects for the continent may be never attained. Nevertheless, he claims that in spite of Santa Teresa’s doubts, hiding herself as a bride of Christ, she is confident that He will arrive. Similarly, Prospero strongly believes that his vision for the continent will be achieved. Ette explains that the soul structure that Prospero projects through the king’s story is akin to the one that Santa Teresa draws in *Las moradas del castillo interior*. Both of them believe that the inmost soul is the point of departure for the path to perfection, towards union with the ideal. It is this path that

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wrote *Camino de perfección* (1583) and *Las moradas del castillo interior* (1588), among other books (see Walsh, 1943).

26. 1985, 23. González Echevarría claims that the dual role that Prospero plays, both as the figure of the maestro and as the puppet of his master (Rodó), is crucial to understanding how the text implies both a general cultural conception and a specific identity for Latin America. This definition of culture is shaped by the Latin American bourgeoisie’s ideology, which he claims defines “[a] conceptualization and practice of an idea of literature (1985, 8).

27. 2000.

28. 1967, 208.

29. *Ibid.*, 209.

allows Santa Teresa to envision the mystic union with God, just as it is this path that leads Prospero to imagine union with his vision of Latin America's future.<sup>30</sup>

Through this analysis of the parable about the hospitable king in *Ariel*, we do finally possess all of the elements necessary to answer Reyes' questions about Rodó's work introduced at the beginning of this section: "¿[Q]ué árabe le enseñó el secreto de la gracia insinuante? ¿Qué místico de oro le enseñó—filósofo práctico—a sorprender las pisadas inefables del Dios entre los trabajos y los días humildes?" (1917, 136–137). In his essay on Rodó these are rhetorical questions that Reyes never completely answers, although he seems to imply the answers that I suggest. As González Echevarría writes, Arabic sources probably inspired Santa Teresa to conceive her Christian notion of the soul's structure, and Ette's study confirms that the Spanish mystic's texts are intertwined within *Ariel*.<sup>31</sup> I posit that Reyes' questions reveal that he had perceived these genealogies between the lines of Rodó's writing. Moreover, I will demonstrate that he embraced Rodó's idea that intellectuals, as they transcend both social contradictions and material constrictions and master a superior form of knowledge, would be able to achieve a mystical union with the ideal and were thus invested with the authority to interpret the sacred values that should guide the common people and educate their souls.

Furthermore, Reyes radicalized Rodó's influence because he envisioned this mystical experience not as an inaccessible region of the soul, but rather as a utopian vision for the continent. He removed the *modernista* interpretation of the mystical fusion with the ideal from its place in an inner, private sphere of the self and placed it in the outer world. His ideal vision of society was conceived in a private sphere and represented his bourgeois and humanist precepts, but rather than being a singular introspective experience Reyes thought it should be the outcome of a communal mystical experience shared by a select group of intellectuals. I analyze this displacement in the following section, as I trace how Reyes introduced the notion of the *Ultima Tule* in his work.<sup>32</sup> However, I first

30. Ette, 2000, 73–93.

31. See González Echevarría 1985, 23 and Ette, 2000, 73–74.

32. Rafael Gutiérrez Girardot develops an exhaustive analysis of this topic in his introductory essay to *Ultima Tule y otros ensayos* (in which he compiles several of Reyes' essays about his ideal vision for the continent), but he does not address the connection between Reyes' appropriation of the notion *Ultima Tule* and Rodó's text, 1991.

explain his belief that mystical thought could become a philosophy of praxis capable of inspiring an intervention by intellectuals in the world of the common people.

Reyes accorded a crucial relevance to the manifestations of mysticism, because he believed that they could trigger a tremendous vital drive in people that could lead them to actively intervene in their world. In an obscure early essay, “El misticismo activo” (1917), which he wrote in the same period as “Visión de Anáhuac,” it is clear that his thinking was deeply influenced by William James’ understanding of mysticism and vitalism.<sup>33</sup> In this essay, Reyes argues that the value of words resides in their hidden meanings. He says that it is in these obscure halos of resonance that the soul of each era is revealed—in the elusive connotations of words. Reyes claims that both individual and collective behaviors evolve through these secret meanings. There is a dimension within language that remains an enigma for the people, an enigma that haunts their actions. He asserts that when it is not attached to any religious doctrine mysticism moves towards these obscure significances of words.<sup>34</sup>

Reyes defines mysticism in the following manner: “[T]odo impulso que ignora su fin o que lo ha olvidado o no lo tiene y que se agota, por eso, en un holocausto incesante. Toda energía que, en su desborde, ahoga la conciencia, toda fuerza que se vuelve loca” (273). He believes that mysticism is a dynamic force without a fixed purpose. It is the vital drive of a creature eager to overcome the conception of its creator. But, he explains that mysticism is secular in its procedures and is not necessarily subordinated to an idol. In fact, mysticism can overcome any illusion of idolatry. In this essay, there seems to be a parallel with the historical context of World War I, as if the tragic events that took place at that time in Europe should be interpreted as the consequence of the liberation of a mystical force that, when harnessed by national passions, liberated mysticism’s vital drive toward death, leading millions to

33. Conn clarifies that if Reyes, during this first period of his intellectual production, “lives’ the Jamesian bourgeois imperative to manage the spirit, it should be said that he does so from a height from which James himself sought to descend” (2002, 111). William James (1842–1910) was one of the most widely known American intellectuals at the turn of the nineteenth century. As a professor at Harvard University he taught and wrote about philosophy, psychology, and religion, among other subjects. Some of his most influential works are *The Principle of Psychology*, which appeared in 1890, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, the published version of a series of lectures he delivered at the University of Edinburgh in 1902, and *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, which was published posthumously in 1912 (see Myers, 1986).

34. See Reyes, 1917, 274.

die in the trenches.<sup>35</sup> To offer another interpretation, it is possible to read prophetic nuances into his words, as if the horror in which Europe was soon to be engulfed could be perceived as the consequence of a mystical force channeled through the worship of a fascist ideology.

After reading James, Reyes claimed that in a soldier's heart there is a kind of mysticism.<sup>36</sup> James compares a soldier's military rigor and austerity with the qualities of an ascetic saint and reflects on the differences in their spiritual characteristics. He writes: "If the soldier is to be good for anything as a soldier, he must be exactly the opposite of a reasoning and thinking man."<sup>37</sup> This irrational instinct, which James sees as the goal of military training, renders the soldier always ready to act, without any attachment to material things, and to put his life at risk on the battlefield. He argues that this training should be a discipline for all to embrace: "What we now need to discover in the social realm is the moral equivalent of war: something heroic that will speak to men as universally as war does."<sup>38</sup> Reyes claims that the kind of detachment from material considerations recommended by James, characterized by a nomadic lifestyle and driven by a vital force that foregrounds the necessity of exerting an active mysticism, allows people to become masters of themselves by accessing all of their vital energy.<sup>39</sup>

By introducing key poetic words and literary texts, such as the Nahua poems and the notion of the *Ultima Tule*, Reyes aimed to channel the mysticism and arcane knowledge that the continent emanated. He analyzed and appropriated through his hermeneutic approach to the literal meanings of these poetic texts and words, and offered a rational understanding of them. Nonetheless, he did not completely illuminate the meanings that they held for him. On the contrary, he seemed to encode the more obscure meanings of these texts and words within his own writing. Only by placing them adjacent to the conceptual pillars of his work overall does a resonance occur through which these encrypted meanings can be interpreted. But even when one interprets these hidden meanings in his texts and tries to conceptualize them, they still provoke a reverberation that

35. Reyes wrote this essay while he was in Spain in 1917. Both the beginning of World War I and the fall of Victoriano Huerta's government in 1914 to Venustiano Carranza's coup, which suppressed Mexican diplomatic representation abroad, forced Reyes and his family to abruptly leave Paris, where he held the position of secretary to the Mexican diplomatic delegation, and move to Spain (see Alicia Reyes, 1976.)

36. *Ibid.*, 1917, 274.

37. 2002, 366

38. *Ibid.*, 367.

39. *Ibid.*, 276–277.

suggests even deeper secrets that the author himself seems to sense, yet never completely reveals. Thus, Reyes emerges as a kind of sorcerer or oracle who steadily discloses some secret knowledge that he controls to conjure the mysticism it conveys.

Reyes' narrative strategy, which combines a rational understanding of specific sources of knowledge yet cyphers within his writing secret meanings that he derived from these sources to convey a transcendental force, was both a symptom of his time and perhaps also in a clandestine dialogue with it. In his historical context, a rampant mysticism enveloped both esoteric groups of intellectuals and political movements in both national and international contexts, particularly during the inter-war period, and Reyes was well aware of the organizations. In fact, his father, Bernardo Reyes, was a prominent member of the Masonic lodge controlled by Porfirio Díaz, and the system of Masonic lodges, which played a crucial role in the national state building process of the nineteenth century, continued to operate well into the twentieth century.<sup>40</sup> During the 1920s and 1930s, the Rosacruz brotherhood *Quetzalcóatl* coalesced in Mexico City, composed of politicians, intellectuals, and artists, among them Diego Rivera, Ramón P. Denegri, Jesús Silva Herzog, Manuel Gamio, and Eduardo Villaseñor; Reyes knew several of these members.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, he was also a close friend of José Vasconcelos. His work was the paradigmatic example of mystical intellectual thought at the time in Mexico, and it nourished a fascist ideology that inspired the *Unión Nacional Sinarquista* in Guanajuato in 1938.<sup>42</sup> As G. Williams has pointed out, this movement was evoked by "a religious utopia motivated by 'cristero' millenarianism and the Spanish falangista myths of blood, sacrifice and death."<sup>43</sup>

Reyes' diplomatic and personal travels to Argentina—he served as Mexican ambassador there in 1927–1930 and 1936–1937—also allowed him to meet other intellectuals who were involved in these types of organizations, some of whom studied them in depth. Reyes' close friend Leopoldo Lugones, one of the most prominent intellectuals at the time, actively participated in extending the influence of the Theosophical Society throughout the Americas.<sup>44</sup> In Argentina,

40. See Beatriz Urías Horcasitas, 2007.

41. See Renato González Mello, 2001.

42. See Miriam Jerade Dana, 2015.

43. 2012, 29.

44. For an analysis of the development of the Theosophical Society in Argentina, see Soledad Quereilhac, 2016. Helena Blavatsky, a Russian believer in spiritism and occultism, and Henry S. Olcott cofounded the Theosophical Society in New York in 1875, which then extended first to Europe, then to Latin America, becoming popular

Reyes also met Roger Caillois, one of the founders of the Collège de Sociologie (1937–39), a research center in Paris that studied primitive and secret communities, who became a close friend.<sup>45</sup> While Reyes was the dean of El Colegio de México in 1944, that institution translated and published Caillois' "Ensayo sobre el espíritu de las sectas." In this text, Caillois claims that the rise of National Socialism in Germany was the final outcome of a process that started with the formation of a sect shrouded in obscure mysticism, which then assumed the form of a political party, finally achieving the power of the state.

This climate of secret societies, sects, and clandestine groups in both the national and international contexts—restricted communities that articulated hermetic narratives imbued with esoteric thought—permeated ample segments of a Latin American middle-class that included intellectuals such as Reyes. Therefore, I believe it is crucial to examine the influence of these kinds of organizations on Reyes' thought, as the core of the very model he proposed for a circle of intellectuals who should direct the development of society.

### ***Ultima Tule: Esoteric Words***

*Ultima Tule*, the poetic expression that Reyes chose for the title of the book he published in 1942, synthesizes his utopian vision for the continent, and it is also one key to understanding the way that he believed that his narrative could actually intervene in the world.<sup>46</sup> The book comprises several of his previous texts. In the essay "El presagio de América" (1941), he introduces this expression quoting Seneca and alluding to America as the continent that the Latin writer prophesied would appear from beyond the horizon.<sup>47</sup> Reyes

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among people from many social backgrounds. This school combined elements from Eastern and Western religions and used a scientific manner of speech to describe experiments that members conducted to probe the manifestations of spiritual forces (see Evans, 1904).

45. Caillois was forced to remain in exile in Argentina during World War II. He published several essays in the journal *Sur* (see Frank, 2003). Reyes became well acquainted with Caillois' cultural project and with his participation in the formation of a closed community of intellectuals.

46. See Reyes. *Ultima Tule* in *Obras completas*, Vol. XI, 1960.

47. In *Medea*, Seneca writes: "[...] Rhenumque bibunt / Venient annis saecula seris, / quibus Oceanus uincla rerum / laxet et ingens pateat tellus / Tethysque novos detegat orbes / nec sit terris ultima Thule" [Time will come in future years / When Ocean looses the bonds / Of things, the vast earth lies open, / Tethys uncovers new worlds, / And Thule is not land's end] (2014, XC). Reyes probably also aimed to echo Pytheas's *Ultima Thule*, and Virgil, who writes in *Georgics*: "[...] ac tua nautae/

embraces the idea of the *Ultima Tule*, which refers to a mythic Nordic land, as an image for the dream world that the Europeans envisioned before discovering the New World, and he appropriates this image as the utopian vision that he believed the continent still reflected.<sup>48</sup>

By evoking the mythical land *Ultima Tule*, Reyes aimed to capture the mysticism that literature infuses in secular thought to represent the first Europeans' utopian visions of a new world. In "El presagio de América," Reyes recreates both the fables and the scientific hypotheses that led the conquistadores to discover America, but he focuses particular attention on how literature permeated humanist intellectuals' secular thinking to lead European explorers to both envision a new world and to realize their vision. He points out that it was the poetic word that first made visible the utopia of America. He argues that a new world had been sensed both in poetry and in science before it was actually discovered. Mediterranean fables and European poetry, as well as ancient and classic literature, mention a land that had disappeared at the vortex of the oceans and would reappear beyond the marine horizons, as did the Tule of Seneca. The Americas were a dream world for both poets and scientists. Nevertheless, Reyes emphasizes that it was literature that first embraced these prophecies and then communicated these strange premonitions to secular thinkers, who afterwards guided the explorers to materialize the dreamland of a new world on the other side of the ocean.<sup>49</sup>

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Numina sola colant, tibi serviat ultima Thule, / Teque sibi generum Tethys emat omnibus undis [ . . . ]" [and shall seafarers pray / To thy godhead alone, and uttermost Thule be thrall to thy power, / And the sea-queen give thee her daughter with all her waves] (1912, 1–4). I argue that Reyes noted that Rodó also introduced this expression in *Ariel*.

48. Richard F. Burton has pointed out that *Thule* is certainly used by Virgil poetically and rhetorically to refer to the remotest part of the septentrional world, and to its people either real or imagined. He explains that Seneca then echoes this use in his prophetic verse, which has been evoked and extended to refer to the New World. Furthermore, Burton argues that there is no doubt that during the Roman Empire, "Thule was applied to Scandinavia" (see Burton, 1875, 23).

49. In this sense, it is interesting to consider Bernal Díaz del Castillo's first reaction to his encounter with the New World. He writes: "Parecía a las cosas de encantamiento que, cuentan en el libro de *Amadís* [ . . . ] No sé cómo lo cuente" 1960, 260. Reyes places this quote at the beginning of the second section of his essay "Visión de Anáhuac (1519)" because it reaffirmed his conviction that literature is not only a passive imaginary contemplation but rather that imagination can actively intervene in the world and envision new worlds. In the next pages, I will discuss how Reyes believed that fables and legends had actually guided the conquistadores toward the new world.

Reyes suggests that traces were left in the European imagination by previous expeditions to the continent, perhaps by Asian and Scandinavian missions, which Mediterranean fables and poetry collected, that influenced the first scientific hypotheses about the existence of a new world. In this manner, literature initiated a mystical drive in Western thought, which was a crucial step in the transition from fantasy to reality. Reyes asserts that during the Renaissance the inspiration that literature had embraced to imagine the existence of a new world influenced humanist intellectuals, who were the first to raise questions about the Earth's roundness, the antipodes, and the navigability of the Atlantic Ocean. Then, non-humanists—entrepreneurs and travelers—pursued the intellectuals' vision as if they were following their instructions. Reyes depicts this crossroads of encounters: “La acción se había puesto al servicio de la inteligencia en el más profundo y armonioso sentido. Soñando con descubrir las bien hadadas islas utópicas, aquellos hombres iban realizando de paso una maravillosa Utopía” (29). Guidelines for men of action were determined by establishing lines of communication between mysticism and secular thought. Moreover, political effects were achieved by these means.

In this sense, in “En el día Americano” (1932) Reyes writes: “[E]l conocimiento habrá precedido al acto, y será la comunicación espiritual la que provoque, en su decurso, efectos políticos” (67). I posit that he called on Latin American intellectuals to incite this convergence. They must create in their narratives utopian visions to express the mystical force emanated by the continent, and articulate this numinous force within their secular thought; from this intersection, political effects could be provoked as men of action will pursue their utopian vision. Reyes delineated his ideal visions about the continent in his writings by introducing key poetic terms such as the Nahua poems he includes in “Visión de Anáhuac (1519)” and by using the expression *Ultima Tule*, as explained above. Alluding to Reyes' interpretation of the Nahua poem in which the poet is recalling flowers from the depth of the Valley, Andrés Zamora writes: “Reyes, como el poeta anónimo, corta y recoge los frutos de un feraz jardín de signos para con ellos hacer su propia guirnalda o su propio canto.”<sup>50</sup> In a similar manner, by introducing the expression *Ultima Tule* Reyes configures America as a mythical land around which signs are orbiting, and he articulates these signs into a sequence that invests them with specific meanings to argue

50. 1996, 221.

that the continent continues to encrypt a utopia and that it is the task of intellectuals to initiate a chain of events that will lead people of action to materialize this ideal vision.

Following Gilles Deleuze in *Logic of Sense*, I maintain that these key poetic terms in Reyes' work function and have the same structure as esoteric words.<sup>51</sup> Deleuze explains that esoteric words regulate two heterogeneous series: "one series of pure expressions and one series of denotations."<sup>52</sup> The first series represents the signifier, which can be any sign that presents itself as perceivable by the senses, while the second series represents the signified, which is correlated to the first series and functions to denote the meanings of the sign that the first series expresses. For instance, Reyes articulates these series when he asserts that the flowers in the Nahuatl poem allude to the historical time immediately before the Spaniards' arrival, which was a rainy season during which flowers blossomed.<sup>53</sup> The flowers are pure expressions of the Pre-Hispanic past, signs that Reyes uses to represent an ideal world. The expression *Ultima Tule* is also a sign, a pure expression that refers to the utopian vision of a new world, a vision that Reyes argues is what led the Europeans to "discover" America. For Reyes, these poetic images set in motion floating signifiers that orbit America, a utopian continent, and he articulated the signified series by capturing and codifying them in a progressive manner in order to develop a rational understanding. These key terms function as esoteric words in Reyes' work because he derived from them an arcane knowledge about the continent, which he believed could shape itself into actions guiding people to realize the visions the poetic words project.

However, Deleuze asserts that the relationship between the two series, the signifier and the signified, is in constant disequilibrium because the first series conveys an excess that the second series can never totally grasp. The signified series cannot apprehend the signifier's totality. There is always a gap between the two, and floating signifiers can drift away and diverge from any form of denotation.<sup>54</sup> Pivoting on a cryptic dimension in his system of thought, Reyes aimed to close this gap and coordinate communication between the two series. He believed that he could perform a synthesis of the two and thus guarantee their coexistence; a meeting point that he thought

51. See Deleuze, specifically the chapter "Seventh Series of Esoteric Words" in *Logic of Sense* (1990).

52. *Ibid.*, 1990, 43.

53. *Ibid.*, 7.

54. *Ibid.*, 1990, 47.

would produce political results. But a single individual could not carry out this operation alone. Thus, Reyes needed to foster the formation of a community of intellectuals who were exclusively entitled to guard the primordial signifiers that the continent emanated. This community would strengthen an intellectual hierarchy supported by various journals, publishing houses, and institutions to legitimize their power and knowledge to codify these signifiers.

The exceptionality of Reyes' case stems from the fact that he was not only positioning himself through his hermeneutic approach as an organizer of the Latin American intellectual elite, but also that he was a leading figure in the formation of literary institutions in Mexico specifically designed to create an elite group of readers. Reyes belonged to a generation that came of age along with the process of the institutionalization of culture in both Mexico and Latin America. As Ignacio Sánchez Prado points out, the autonomy that the *modernista* writers had achieved by the turn of the century did not have the support of institutions: It was Reyes' generation of intellectuals that took on the actual project of building them. He was not an erudite figure that created an alternative archive in order to withdraw to an ivory tower; rather, his alternative archive was used to intervene in his cultural milieu by laying the foundations for new cultural and literary institutions.<sup>55</sup>

### **Militant Humanists**

In contrast to the dissemination of discourses and actual political movements that in the first half of the twentieth century developed into a radical reconfiguration of social and political structures claiming to pursue utopias, Reyes' project for the Latin American intelligentsia stood out as a strategy to regulate such narratives and to foster a cultural hegemony that would preclude such uprisings. His aim was to temper the passion for radical change and to restore a political order in which intellectuals took a leading role in the development of society. In order to redirect these forces into a system that would regulate them, a new narrative must be created that would subjugate and overshadow the proliferation of discourses about the Latin American utopia. The community of intellectuals that Reyes proposed would construct an institutional apparatus intended to produce a true utopian vision that would insist that a particular knowledge was the fundamental precondition necessary to conceive of and to understand it. Thus, this knowledge had to remain

55. See Sánchez Prado, 2012<sup>b</sup>, 13–38.

controlled by a chosen minority because whoever possessed it had the power to define the order that should be imposed on society.

The model of the Latin American intellectual whom Reyes thought should participate in the elite group that he aimed to organize seems to derive from the ideal humanist that Julian Benda proposes in his influential book *The Treason of the Intellectuals* (1927).<sup>56</sup> In his book, Benda denounces modern *clerics*, as he calls the intellectuals who betray their legacy by renouncing transcendental values in favor of pursuing practical and material goals. Because they are engaged in the game of national politics, these modern clerics exacerbate the worst aspects of the layman's political passion, nationalism, and bellicosity. The clerics allow themselves to be driven by fanatical patriotism. In contrast, Benda claims that the humanist has a sensitivity toward the abstract nature of what is human and thus will advocate for a higher concept of humanity. He writes that humanism "is a pure passion of the intelligence, implying no terrestrial love" (80). Benda's humanism had a cosmopolitan spirit which Reyes sought to imbue in his own cultural project. Nevertheless, he reworked Benda's model of the humanist to encourage the active intervention of intellectuals in their historical context.<sup>57</sup>

Reyes deconstructed Benda's distinction between abstract values and the actual order that is imposed on the world to argue that intellectuals should not gauge society according to absolute values not connected to actual circumstances. The question about what order ought to exist in the world can only be answered in a context that engenders a course, and politics, of action. He believed that the moral decay of society must be counteracted by a select order of individuals, an intellectual elite that founded on a well-defined ethic should whisper into the statesmen's ears both by giving advice and by judging their actions. Facing a decline in the influence of intellectuals in politics in the new social orders that emerged during the interwar period, and also facing volatile scenarios in his national context and on the stage of international affairs, he sought to reposition the role

56. Reyes was well acquainted with Benda's work. This can be verified, as Reyes' personal book collection contains the first editions of Benda's books. The French author sent him all of his books as soon as they were published. See Carolina Olguin García and Jorge Saucedo, 2011, 109–110.

57. It is interesting to note that Caillois, who inscribed and circulated his work within the tightly knit network woven through the continent and across the Atlantic by the Pan-American intellectual elite, also reworked Benda's book in his essay "Sociology of the Intellectual," which was published in France in 1939 and reprinted in Mexico in 1943.

of the intellectual in society and to link a closed circle of intellectuals with the political decision-making process.<sup>58</sup> In his writing is cyphered the cartography that he believed would guide the Pan-American intelligentsia to navigate the turmoil of the interwar period and to reclaim the spiritual authority that should direct the political regimes and societies that had been radically reconfigured during the first decades of the twentieth-century.

*Monterrey* (1930–1937), a one-person epistolary bulletin that Reyes wrote and distributed from Río de Janeiro while serving as Mexican ambassador to Brazil (although the last issue was published in Buenos Aires after he'd reassumed his position as ambassador to Argentina), was a crystallization of the intellectual network that Reyes had formed with members of intellectual elites from Latin America, the U.S., and Europe. The journal was distributed solely to a close circle of friends. Aimer Granados writes: “[A] través de su publicación Reyes empujó la conformación de una red de escritores con carácter transnacional americano y transatlántico *vis a vis* América-Europa.”<sup>59</sup> In *Monterrey*, Reyes discusses many topics, such as new books that he received, as well as recent literary theory and research. In the sections “Guardians of the Quill” and “The Cleaning of America,” he particularly encouraged intellectuals to create a bibliography that could represent Latin American literature and history and to make this selection available to European intellectuals.<sup>60</sup>

58. In the global context, as Reyes sensed the imminent collapse of Europe under the boots of totalitarian regimes, he urged the members of the Latin American intellectual elites to form a Pan-American front to preserve Western culture and civilization after their decimation in Europe. See Reyes. “Notas sobre la inteligencia americana” (1936). In Mexico, Lázaro Cárdenas’ decision to nationalize foreign-owned oil resources in 1938, among other reforms, had reactivated utopian visions forged during the revolution, but these reforms also led to rising economic and political tensions with the great powers and foreign-owned oil companies (U.S., Dutch, British), who imposed an embargo against Mexican oil. The oil expropriation and the government’s strategic alliance with Nazi Germany to break the embargo also exacerbated the deeply rooted conflict between nationalists and leftist factions and raised the somber specter of a civil war. See Schuler 1998, 63–89. Also see G. Williams, 2012, 24.

59. See Granados, 2012, 85. For space reasons, I will not be able to include here the list of names of the approximately three hundred intellectuals who received Reyes’ personal journal—although several of them are mentioned in this article—or to trace how these intellectuals were in turn connected to other journals, editorial boards, publishing houses, and educational institutions. It will remain for a future article to examine how each of these intellectuals acted as nodes that functioned as liaisons between all of these points, which composed a complex system exclusively operated by members of intellectual elites. For a brief mapping of this network, see Granados, 94–99.

60. See Cecilia Laura Alonso, 2008, 37, and Alberto Enríquez Perea, 2008, 44–46.

Therefore, *Monterrey* not only served as a platform from which Reyes could circulate his own ideas, but also sought to define the Hispanic cultural field and to decide who should be in this circle and who should be out.

The Argentinean cultural and literary journal *Sur* (1931–1970) and the homonymous publishing house both founded by Victoria Ocampo were other crucial links in the network Reyes helped to form. The journal and the publishing house produced a constellation of publications and translations of primarily European authors that decisively influenced a new generation of Latin American intellectuals. As a member of the international editorial board Reyes advocated, along with Henríquez Ureña, that *Sur* should have a Pan-American, continental perspective, which Ocampo herself clearly embraces in a letter addressed to Waldo Frank that was included in the first issue of the journal.<sup>61</sup> However, Reyes and Ureña were skeptical about the journal's real engagement with a Pan-American stance.<sup>62</sup> *Sur* was focused on importing the work of European writers rather than promoting local authors and had an ambivalent and paternalistic view of Latin American culture. The inclusion of Reyes and Ureña in the editorial board certainly enabled more space to be granted to Latin American writers, but comparatively few of them were published such as Jorge Luis Borges, Gabriela Mistral, Vicente Huidobro, and Octavio Paz.<sup>63</sup> The journal became a powerful organ that regulated the inclusion and exclusion of Latin American writers and decided who should and should not be canonized.

Reyes' project also materialized in a higher education institution. After he finally returned to Mexico in 1939, he actively collaborated with Daniel Cosío Villegas, who had founded the influential publishing house Fondo de Cultura Económica in 1934, to build

61. See Ocampo, 1931.

62. See Fernández Bravo, 2009, 128.

63. See John King, 1986, 84. Nevertheless, the journal revamped its Pan-American stance in 1939 when War World II began to try to organize an anti-fascist front. See María Teresa Gramuglio, 1986, 32–39. María Rosa Oliver, a co-founding member of the journal who strongly agreed with Reyes' and Ureña's Pan-American position, had a leading role in plotting the new course the journal adopted. She edited a special issue (Num. 96, 1942) dedicated to Brazil, which was an homage not just to the country's literature, but also to the political initiatives of the Brazilian regime, which had entered into WWII against Germany and exhorted the American continent to stand against fascism. During the war, Oliver also served in the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs directed by Nelson Rockefeller in Washington, D.C, to foster an alliance among members of intellectual elites in the Americas to strengthen this anti-fascist front. See Fernández Bravo, 2008, 19–26.

“La Casa de España,” which had been conceived by then-president Lázaro Cárdenas in 1938 as a cultural shelter to receive intellectuals and scientists fleeing from Spain during and after their civil war. Reyes’ intention was to create a research center to host international intellectuals and artists. Through President Cárdenas’ appointment of him as director, he was granted the autonomy that he was seeking and named the institution El Colegio de México in 1940.<sup>64</sup> Reyes then focused on the formation of elite cadres of humanist intellectuals who he thought could play a decisive role in leading the nation. However, he did not realize that the rapidly modernizing Mexican state, particularly the development of its bureaucratic apparatus, which had expanded to incorporate technicians to deal with the complexity of both the local and global contexts, left little room for intellectuals to become interlocutors for politicians. The state would provide these intellectuals with financial support for their institutions, grant them scholarships, and continue to appoint them to the diplomatic body, but their project of articulating a political, ideological, and cultural program for the Mexican postrevolutionary state was coming to an end.

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64. See Lida 2000.

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