

Preface

AS IS OFTEN the case, the central ideas for this book grew out of previous work. My *Rubén Darío and the Romantic Search for Unity*, also published by the University of Texas Press, focused on the head of the *modernista* movement and his poetic quest to fill the spiritual void of modern life. In the chapter on *modernista* poetry published in the three-volume *Cambridge History of Latin American Literature*, I began to explore other fundamental features of the *modernista* project. I showed that politics was an essential element of the movement and that this political vision was intimately tied to *modernismo*'s epistemological assumptions. As I developed this premise, I came to understand that *modernismo* was, for Spanish America, just the first in a series of complex and continuing confrontations with modernity. I therefore set out to place *modernismo* in a broader temporal framework, clarifying the way *modernismo* affected the works of those authors that came after.

Though the presentation of these ideas forms the core of the book, I did not want the beauty and power of *modernista* texts to be lost from sight. I have sought to maintain in the forefront the verbal grace, majesty, and force of the works while attempting to put finally to rest—through careful analysis and presentation—the persistent but erroneous belief that *modernismo* is a movement more concerned with form than content. This

misconception has grossly shortchanged the far-reaching significance of the *modernista* project.

While I have addressed concerns of interest to specialists, I have also aspired to open the intellectual wealth and energy of the movement to those interested in other areas of Hispanic and world literature. To achieve this goal, I have translated all titles and texts into English, relying only occasionally on published translations. I have laid out the translations of poems in paragraph form to indicate that, in trying to remain as faithful as possible to the sense of the original, I have not attempted to reproduce the poetic structure. The slashes within these prose translations are meant to help readers who are unfamiliar with Spanish locate themselves in the original. Even here, however, English word order occasionally demands radical departures from the Spanish. So as not to clutter the page excessively, title translations appear only the first time that they are cited.

I am indebted to those who have taken the time to read the manuscript and offer suggestions. My heartfelt thanks go out to Roberto González Echevarría of Yale University for his insights, comments, and long-standing friendship. I am also thankful to Ana Eire of Stetson University for our ongoing exchange of ideas and for her assistance in capturing the nuances of some Spanish titles in English. To my colleagues and graduate students at Vanderbilt, I am grateful for a stimulating and productive environment. I thank my parents, mother-in-law, family, and friends for their quiet support and affection. For Ramón, no words of appreciation can possibly be enough. He has shared with me twenty-five years of living. In the process, he has shown me the strengths of the sociological way of thinking. He also encouraged me, throughout the writing of this work, to clarify difficult ideas and complex sentences. His loyalty and love are uncommon. Together we have raised our daughter, Rachel, to whom this book is dedicated and for whom a lifetime of love is offered in every word.

Finally, I wish to express my appreciation to Vanderbilt University and the University Research Council for the sabbatical leaves and various grants that have made it possible for me to research and write this book.

Modernismo, Modernity,
and the Development of Spanish American Literature

