



# **A Dream of Arcadia: Anti-Industrialism in Spanish Literature, 1895-1905**

*Lily Litvak*

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The dream of “progress” that animated many nineteenth-century artistic and political movements gave way at the turn of the century to a dissatisfaction with the Industrial Civilization and a recurrent pessimism about a future dominated by mechanization. Art Nouveau, which was both a style and a movement, embodied this dissatisfaction, marking the turn-of-the-century period with an aesthetic that consciously set out to revolutionize literature, the arts, and society within the framework of a brutalizing, wildly burgeoning Industrial Civilization. Generally associated with northern European culture, Art Nouveau also had a great impact in the south, particularly in Spain.

*A Dream of Arcadia* is the first work to explore Spain’s fertile and imaginative Art Nouveau. Through the eyes of four major Spanish writers, Lily Litvak views several different aspects of the turn-of-the-century struggle against the advances of industrialism in Spain. Her interpretation of the early works of Ramón del Valle Inclán, Miguel de Unamuno, José Martínez Ruiz (Azorín), and Pío Baroja exposes a longing for a preindustrial arcadia based on a return to nature, the revival of handicrafts and medieval art, an attraction to rural primitive societies, and a revulsion against the modern city. Set against the European literary and artistic background of the period, her observations place the Spanish manifestations of Art Nouveau within the context of the better-known northern phenomena. Of particular interest is her discussion of the influences of John Ruskin, William Morris, and the Pre-Raphaelites, which demonstrates how the general European mood was articulated in Spain.

Litvak concludes that Valle Inclán, Unamuno, Azorín, and Baroja must be considered as more than simply fin de siècle writers, for they became part of a general movement, generated by Art Nouveau, that spans an entire century. *A Dream of Arcadia* demonstrates that Art Nouveau was more than a flash on Europe's artistic horizon; it is a philosophy with ramifications that have led to communes, handcrafted articles, and nomadic adolescents in search of truth.

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