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A "PERISTYLE" WITHOUT A ROOF:
CLARÍN'S *SU ÚNICO HIJO*
AND ITS UNFINISHED TRILOGY

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A "PERISTYLE" WITHOUT A ROOF: CLARÍN'S *SU ÚNICO HIJO* AND ITS UNFINISHED TRILOGY

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Leopoldo Alas's second novel, *Su único hijo*, was published in 1891, six years after *La regenta*.¹ A curious work, it has never enjoyed the latter's popularity, although the recent revival of interest in Clarín has made the novel available to the general public.² Since the 1952 centennial celebration of Alas's birth, critical inquiry into all facets of his life and work has markedly increased and *Su único hijo* has finally begun to receive the attention it deserves.³ Most

¹ The first edition of *Su único hijo*, published in Madrid by Fernando Fe, bears the date 1890, but according to Alas's letters the novel actually appeared in bookstores in the spring of 1891 (Sergio Beser, "Documentos clarinianos I. Seis cartas de Leopoldo Alas a Narciso Oller," *Archivum*, 12 [1962], 522).

² *Su único hijo* only reappeared in print over fifty years after its original publication, when it was included, along with *La regenta* and a selection of stories and critical essays, in Leopoldo Alas, "Clarín," *Obras selectas* (1947; rpt. Madrid, 1966). A single volume, in paperback, was published in Madrid by Alianza Editorial in 1966 (2nd ed., 1969).

³ Mariano Baquero Goyanes, "Una novela de 'Clarín': *Su único hijo*," *Anales de la universidad de Murcia*, 10 (1951-52), 125-71, rpt. in *Prosistas españoles contemporáneos: Alarcón, Leopoldo Alas, Gabriel Miró, Azorín* (Madrid, 1956), pp. 33-125; Ricardo Gullón, "Aspectos de 'Clarín,'" *Archivum*, 2 (Jan.-April, 1952), 161-86; Eduard J. Gramberg, "'Su único hijo,' novela incomprensible de Leopoldo Alas," *Hispania*, 45, No. 2 (May, 1962), 194-99; Frances Wyers Weber, "Ideology and Religious Parody in the Novels of Leopoldo Alas," *BHS*, 43 (1966), 197-208; Cesáreo Bandera, "La sombra de Bonifacio Reyes en *Su único hijo*," *BHS*, 46 (1969), 201-25; Roberto G. Sánchez, "Teatro e intimidad en 'Su único hijo': un aspecto de la modernidad de Clarín," *Ínsula*, No. 311 (October, 1972), pp. 3, 12; Matías Montes Huidobro, "Su único hijo: sinfónico avatar de Clarín," *Archivum*, 22 (1972), 149-209; Carlos Feal Deibe, "La anunciación a Bonis: análisis de *Su único hijo*," *BHS*, 51 (1974), 255-71; and Pierre L. Ullman, "The Antifeminist Premises of Clarín's *Su único hijo*," *Estudos Ibero-americanos* (Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio Grande do Sul, Brasil), Ano 1, No. 1 (July, 1975), pp. 57-91.

discussions of the novel have been partial and dealt only with aspects instead of the novel as a whole. Although it is frequently treated as an individual work — somewhat *sui generis* — comparisons with *La regenta* inevitably occur.

Such comparisons are natural, especially in view of the fact that Clarín wrote only two full-length novels, but overly zealous attempts to analogize the second novel with the first can lead to serious misinterpretations. An example of this is found on the back cover of the most recent edition of *Su único hijo*. It hails the novel, along with *La regenta*, as forming part of “un díptico de la vida española de la época de la Restauración.”⁴ Although the historical period in which the action of *Su único hijo* takes place is vague, a careful study of the text reveals it to be decades earlier than that of *La regenta*, probably in the 1860's. Esthetically, too, *Su único hijo* has little in common with its predecessor: rather than adhering completely to the canons of traditional nineteenth-century realism Clarín's second novel is a transitional work which anticipates twentieth-century novelistic techniques.

Instead of forming a “diptych” with *La regenta*, *Su único hijo* is far more closely related to three novels that Alas was working on at the same time that he was writing his second novel. These three, *Una medianía*, *Esperaindeo* and *Juanito Reseco*, were to have formed a trilogy (a veritable “triptych”) to which *Su único hijo* was to serve as an introduction. The few existing fragments of this uncompleted trilogy suggest an interesting interrelationship between the three as well as with Clarín's second novel. Up to now this question has generally been ignored by critics, with the exception of Sergio Beser.⁵ An examination of these relationships will perhaps shed new light on aspects of *Su único hijo* and, at the same time, offer some possible insight into the question of why the other novels were never finished.

The years between 1885 and 1891, during which period Alas wrote *Su único hijo* and eventually abandoned the trilogy, were among the most important and productive in his life, but they were also years of increasing stress. Clarín had to support his family entirely from his salary as a professor at the University of Oviedo and the earnings from his writing. The birth of two children, in 1883 and 1887, increased his financial burden considerably. Thus, partly stimulated by a surge of creativity and partly out of financial necessity, Leopoldo Alas wrote. He wrote mainly for newspapers in which he published

⁴ The back cover of the second edition of *Su único hijo* published by Alianza Editorial (1969) says of the world of the novel: “el mismo marco ambiental — ‘Vetusta,’ nombre literario del Oviedo de fines de siglo —, contemplado desde distintos ángulos y con diverso propósito, confiere unidad a estas dos grandes novelas, hasta el punto de convertirlas en un díptico de la vida española de la época de la Restauración y en uno de los grandes hitos de la historia de la literatura castellana.”

⁵ “*Sinfonía de dos novelas: fragmento de una novela de ‘Clarín,’*” *Ínsula*, No. 167 (October, 1960), pp. 1, 12.

articles, both serious and satirical, and short stories. During these years he also published eight issues of his own one-man review entitled *Folletos literarios*, six other volumes of criticism (*Sermón perdido*, 1885; *Nueva campaña*, 1887; *Mezclilla*, 1889; *Benito Pérez Galdós*, 1898) and a collection of stories (*Pipá*, 1886).

The publication of *La regenta* in 1885 had created, as Juan Antonio Cabezas terms it in chapter XIII of his biography, an "escándalo oficial."⁶ The church and many of the people of Oviedo were not the only ones to object to the novel, however. Clarín's enemies launched a series of intensified attacks in the press of the day. Perhaps the most vituperous of his critics was the well-known and exceedingly aggressive journalist, Luis Bonafoux y Quintero, who, among other things, accused Clarín of plagiarizing *La regenta* from *Madame Bovary*. The fact that Alas was not immune to this type of attack is evidenced by his prompt — and acerbic — reply to Bonafoux in the same year: a lengthy counterattack entitled "Mis plagios" (*Folletos literarios IV*, Madrid, 1888). This hostility between Clarín and his enemies in these years often erupted into open warfare, something which Palacio Valdés occasionally comments upon in his correspondence with Alas.⁷

Clarín's personal letters from the period suggest not only that he might have been far more sensitive to criticism than he publicly admitted, but also reveal a deep sense of anguish about his writing as well as concern as to his physical health and his financial situation. In a letter to the Catalan novelist, Narciso Oller, dated December 16, 1885, he writes of a "mal estar" which, along with his other occupations, has prevented him from finding the time, calm and strength of concentration to read the works Oller had sent him.⁸ According to one biographer, Alas's wife began to fear for his health in 1886: "En este verano empieza para Clarín aquella fiebre productora, verdadera orgía del pensamiento que había de agotar sus nervios y su cerebro en poco más de diez años" (Cabezas, p. 147). On April 1, 1887, Alas wrote to Galdós that he was feeling better: "Yo me siento este año mejor de los nervios. . . . Me siento fecundo, y sino fuera por la convicción de que el límite en que yo puedo moverme es muy reducido, trabajaría con ahinco. Se me ocurren más cosas que nunca y tengo planes para diez ó doce cuentos ó novelas."⁹ Seven months

⁶ "Clarín," *el provinciano universal* (1936; rpt. Madrid, 1962).

⁷ Marcelino Menéndez y Pelayo, Miguel de Unamuno and Armando Palacio Valdés, *Epistolario a Clarín* (Madrid, 1941), pp. 151-52.

⁸ Clarín writes: "Por ocupaciones unas veces, por mal estar muy a menudo, no había conseguido el tiempo, la calma y la fuerza de concentración necesaria para leer y juzgar obras como las de Ud., sobre todo teniendo en cuenta su encargo de decirle mi parecer" (Beser, "Documentos clarinianos I," p. 515). All future quotes from Alas's correspondence with Oller will be from pp. 513-22 of this article.

⁹ Soledad Ortega, ed., *Cartas a Galdós* (Madrid, 1964), p. 241. Future quotes from Clarín's letters to Galdós will be taken from pp. 141-260 of this volume.

later, however, in a letter to the Catalanian critic, José Yxart, dated October 28, 1887, Alas reveals again a sense of fatigue and lack of confidence in his novels, also alluding to his financial pressures: "Estoy en una época de no creer en mis novelas pretéritas ni futuras; sé que esto no sirve ni siquiera para matar la pícara vanidad, sólo sirve para quitarle a uno las ganas de escribir y ganar los cuatro cuartos que le dan por estas quisicosas."¹⁰

In the following year, his problems intensified. On April 11, 1888, he complains about his nerves in a letter to the writer, Rafael Altamira;¹¹ on the 25th of that month, in response to a letter from Alas, Palacio Valdés writes: "Mucho siento que tu salud esté un poco vacilante y que no consigas enriquecer la sangre a fin de tener refrenados los nervios" (*Epistolario a Clarín*, p. 137). Palacio attempts to persuade his friend to stop writing all night, going to bed at dawn and waking up at noon, a habit which seems to have characterized his life during this period. Clarín's letters to Galdós testify to his failing health, the financial pressures under which he found himself, and his general feeling of discouragement. For example, on July 13, 1888, he writes that he had not been feeling well: "Yo estoy malucho; hace muchos meses que en esto de la salud doy una en el clavo y ciento en la herradura." Even in periods of better health he was disheartened and worked only to support his family, as we see in a letter dated March 17, 1888: "Yo estoy muy desanimado en general, pero como ahora tengo salud y dos hijos no hay mas remedio que trabajar." He reiterates his recurring lack of self-confidence as well as his need to earn a living in a letter dated June 29, 1888: "Yo no trabajo mas que porque me hacen falta los cuatro cuartos que gano con mis articulejos, y si llego a publicar mas novelas, creo q^e no será mas que por igual motivo. Hay temporadas, muy largas á veces, en que no *creo en mi*, y esta es una de ellas."

Clarín's letters over the next few years indicate that his feeling of disillusionment persisted. This correspondence offers clear evidence that the "moral crisis" which Cabezas believes that Alas went through in the summer of 1892 was, if anything, the culmination of a long period of increasing indifference, fatigue and pessimism which began in the mid-1880's. As Beser suggests in his introduction to "Siete cartas de Leopoldo Alas a José Yxart": "conversión, crisis moral o lo que sea hay que retrotraerlo unos años respecto a la fecha señalada por Cabezas y seguramente nunca llegó a ser total" (p. 389).

From about 1885 to 1891, then, Alas appears to have passed through a period of tremendous personal crisis in which he not only found it difficult to work, but also in which he questioned and doubted his own ability as a

¹⁰ Sergio Beser, "Siete cartas de Leopoldo Alas a José Yxart," *Archivum*, 10 (1960), 393. Future references to Alas's letters to Yxart will refer to pp. 389-97 of this article.

¹¹ José María Martínez Cachero, "13 Cartas inéditas de Leopoldo Alas a Rafael Altamira, y otros papeles," *Archivum*, 18 (1968), 149.

writer. Despite his impressive output of shorter works, both critical and creative, he was able to finish only one full-length novel. In terms of novelistic production, this period is actually characterized more by what Alas did *not* write than what he actually did. In correspondence with Oller and Galdós, he lists projects for future novels with titles such as *Palomares*, *Bárbara*, *El redentor*, *Papá Dios* and *Del Hígado*, none of which came to fruition. *Su único hijo* and its trilogy also figured in Clarín's plans, and through his letters we can learn more about their interrelationship as well as their fate.

The first reference that we have to the trilogy is found in a letter to Oller dated January 11, 1886, in which Clarín gives the impression of having commenced work on two novels entitled *Una Medianía* and *Juanito Reseco*. He also lists *Su único hijo* as one of his many other projects. Over a year later, on April 1, 1887, he writes to Galdós that he is preparing three novels about three friends: *Una Medianía*, *Esperaindeo* and *Juanito Reseco*. On September 21 of the same year, he indicates to Galdós that he is having problems with the first: "Yo estoy á vueltas con una oposición q^e se llama 'Una medianía' que me parece menos que mediana como dirán, jugando con el vocablo, los críticos mas adelante. Después haré con amore (*sic*) *Esperaindeo* q^e va dedicada á don Benito Perez Galdos." A month later, on October 28, 1887, Alas complains to Yxart that *Una Medianía* is still giving him trouble and that he can't seem to make any progress on it.

On March 17, 1888, he writes to Galdós that he is working on *Su único hijo*: "Estoy haciendo de novelista otra vez y me ocupo en una novelita intitulada 'Su único hijo' q^e es una especie de introducción para 'Una Medianía.'" He repeats generally the same thing to Altamira on April 11 of the same year. Finally, over three years later, on June 17, 1891, he tells Galdós that he has finished *Su único hijo* and is planning to work on its continuation as well as on *Juanito Reseco* and *Esperaindeo*. He complains that he has been kept busy with examinations, newspaper publications, and "el acabar por fin 'Su único hijo' especie de novelucho escrito a tirones y que he terminado, creyendo a ratos que allí hay algo en algunas partes, y a ratos creyendo que no es mas que jugo de adormideras (que no sé si tienen jugo). Tendrá una segunda parte y hasta una tercera." This letter is particularly interesting in that it offers an indication of Clarín's personal opinion of his novel. A connection might be established between the manner in which he wrote it ("a tirones") and the many unexpected surprising and disconcerting shifts in the plot. The "segunda parte" mentioned by Alas no doubt refers to *Una medianía* but what he meant by a "tercera" is unclear.

In a letter to Alas dated September 16, 1891, Menéndez y Pelayo indicates that he has read *Su único hijo*, praises it (with a few reservations), and asks for some clarification of Alas's total plan, specifically about "la segunda y tercera partes de esta trilogía novelesca, cuyo pensamiento me parece entrever, aunq. algo confusamente." In his response, dated October 6, Clarín explains

that *Su único hijo* "no viene a ser más, en efecto, que una introducción" and describes the three novels of the trilogy. He also indicates that he has been working on *Juanito Reseco* for a number of years.¹² Three days later he writes his friend Yxart (Literary Editor of Henrich y Compañía where Alas planned to publish *Juanito Reseco*) that he is sorry not to have sent the first volume of this novel during the summer: "Esa mitad está hecha y la enviaré uno de estos días, pues seguro de no poder continuar en los meses de Agosto y Setiembre . . . no envié antes lo escrito."

Thus, in this period of personal crisis only one novel was born. "Escrito a tirones," *Su único hijo* at least appeared in print. The three novels that were to have followed it were aborted. In a sense, Clarín's "novelucho" and the trilogy it was to have introduced mark a turning point in his life and works: the very incompleteness of this group of four novels must be taken into account if we are to understand Leopoldo Alas's development as a writer.

Although Clarín mentioned plans for several individual novels in 1886, as we have seen, his earliest exposition of the projected trilogy as a whole is found in his April 1 letter to Galdós:

preparo tres novelas que tienen el lazo común de ser la vida de una especie de *tres mosqueteros psicológicos*, como si dijéramos. La primera se llama *Una Medianía* (Antonio Reyes). La 2ª *Esperaindeo* (completamente reformada y refundida; dedicada á Dⁿ Benito Pérez Galdós: obra casi lírica, mi *credo* . . . á lo menos de ciertas horas del día) la 3ª *Juanito Reseco* (mi predilecta).

In his April 11, 1888 letter to Altamira, Alas describes *Su único hijo* as "[una] novela entre analítica, sentimental y humorística que es una especie de peristilo (con unidad) de 'Una Medianía'" (Martínez Cachero, p. 149). The "unity" which Clarín mentions no doubt refers to the fact that the second novel was to be a continuation of the first (Antonio Reyes is the son of Bonifacio Reyes, the main protagonist of *Su único hijo*). Thus *Su único hijo* was to serve specifically as an introduction to *Una medianía*, but since the latter was related to *Esperaindeo* and *Juanito Reseco* (the three protagonists evidently knew one another), *Su único hijo* could also be considered a general introduction to the entire trilogy, as Alas himself insinuated in several letters.

From these letters and other sources, we are able to piece together a more complete picture of the project. The first three chapters of *Speraindeo* (initially spelled this way) were published in the *Revista de Asturias* in 1880.¹³ In this

¹² Marcelino Menéndez y Pelayo and Leopoldo Alas (Clarín), *Epistolario* (Madrid, 1943), pp. 53-55.

¹³ This was "el primer ensayo novelístico del autor de *La Regenta*," according to Martínez Cachero, who includes it in his volume of Leopoldo Alas, "Clarín," *Cuentos* (Oviedo, 1953), pp. 6, 309-32.

fragment, Speraindeo (so named by his erudite uncle after a Christian Mozarabic writer) is a poor, sensitive young man who arrives in Madrid from Pontevedra where his mother has just died. He has come to pay his respects to his uncle, brother of his late mother. His eighteen-year-old cousin, Rosario, is a delicate young creature who, when she first meets him, feels an intense desire to mother him. This theme of parent-child love is further developed in descriptions of Speraindeo's love for his own mother; the same theme is also found in *Una medianía* and in *Su único hijo*. Although Clarín promised Galdós a new version of this first novel, "completamente reformada y refundida," no trace of such a revision has appeared.

Juanito Reseco has a slightly more complicated history. On January 11, 1886, Alas described the novel in a letter to Oller: "El 'Juanito Reseco' que ha de tener dos tomos y que, por ahora, es mi proyecto predilecto y el más antiguo, también [como *Una medianía*] se refiere a la vida literaria pero trata de más cosas." Alas's predilection for this novel, reiterated on several occasions, is understandable judging from the brief description of its protagonist in chapter XX of *La regenta*. In this scene — a dinner in honor of don Pompeyo's "return" to the fold of the Casino — Juanito Reseco makes a short, but memorable, appearance. He is identified as "un tal Juanito Reseco, que escribía en los periódicos en Madrid y venía a Vetusta, su patria, a darse tono de vez en cuando."¹⁴ His voice is sharp, strident, and charged with irony. Inspired by the occasion and the wine, Juanito makes a brief speech in which he prophesies (correctly) that the atheist don Pompeyo will die a Catholic.¹⁵ He then passes out beneath the table. Juanito's wit and intelligence make him an unusually attractive and "balanced" character for Leopoldo Alas. Despite Clarín's state-

¹⁴ (Barcelona, 1963), p. 543.

¹⁵ "—oh tú, Pompeyo, pomposo Pompeyo, voy a darte un disgusto. Tú piensas que en Vetusta no hay más ateos que tú...

—¡Caballerito!...

—Pues yo soy otro; *anch'io sono pittore*. Sólo que tú eres un ateo progresista, un ateo fanático, un teólogo patas arriba... Tú pasas la vida mirando al cielo..., pero lo miras cabeza abajo y por debajo de tus piernas. Y aunque hay contradicción aparente en eso de patas arriba y patas abajo..., todo se concilia, o se resuelve la antinomia, como dicen los filósofos cursis, considerando que el ser bípedo no es para todos...

—Caballerito..., no comprendo esa jerga filosófica. Antes que usted naciera, estaba yo cansado de ser ateo, y si lo que usted se propone es insultar mis canas, y mi consecuencia...

—Decía que eres un teólogo patas arriba; pues sabe que en el mundo civilizado ya nadie habla de Dios, ni para bien ni para mal. La cuestión de si hay Dios o no lo hay, no se resuelve..., se disuelve. Tú no puedes entender esto; pero oye lo que importa: tú, fanático de la negación, morirás en el seno de la Iglesia, del que nunca debiste haber salido. *Amen dico vobis*.

Y cayó Juanito debajo de la mesa" (*La regenta*, pp. 550-51).

ment that he has finished half of *Juanito Reseco* in 1891, no manuscript has yet turned up.

The third "Musketeer," Antonio Reyes, fared slightly better. In the same letter to Oller Alas described his plans for this novel: "Yo ahora tengo entre manos . . . una novela vendida ya a Fé, que provisionalmente se titula *Una medianía*. Pasa en Madrid la acción y se desarrolla en ella parte de la vida literaria. Si se parece algo es, remotamente, a Charles Demaylli, de los Goncourt, pero sólo por asunto." Almost two years later, on October 28, 1887, he complained to Yxart that he couldn't get going on the novel: "Tengo en el telar a *Una medianía*, novela que no acaba de entrar en el período de *ferrocarril* que es para mí el indispensable para escribir con un poco de ilusión y hacerlo menos mal." In 1889, what appears to be the first seven chapters of this novel, was printed in *La España Moderna* under the title of "Sinfonía de dos novelas. (Su único hijo. — *Una medianía*)." ¹⁶ They were reprinted in the posthumous collection of stories, *Doctor Sutilis*. ¹⁷

Before we look at the contents of this fragment and its relationship to *Su único hijo*, a few additional observations about the projected trilogy are in order. We can assume that the three young men, two from Asturias and one who has been living in Galicia, probably met in Madrid. From what we know, we can speculate that the action of all three novels was to take place mostly or entirely in the capital. This concrete and specific world differs enormously from the suggestion of space in *Su único hijo*. The action of the latter takes in a small capital in Asturias which is described with so few details that its symbolic value is heightened: it could be *any* provincial capital city in Spain. Perhaps Alas chose to create such a general and unspecific spatial world in this work precisely because of its general introductory nature. Also, in contrast to *Su único hijo*, the historical period of the trilogy was to be "contemporary," that is to say, the 1880's. ¹⁸ In the fragment of the novel, *Esperaindeo*, the hero appears to be in his early twenties. Juanito Reseco acts (and sounds) as though he were also in his early twenties in the late 1870's when the action of *La regenta* takes place. Antonio Reyes' age is not indicated, but between chapter 3 of *Una medianía*, where he first appears, and chapter 4, where the main action begins, an indefinite period of time ("mucho tiempo") elapses while he is away in Paris. One might assume, then, that he is in his middle to late twenties when the main action of his novel begins. This would make him a contemporary of Speraindeo and Juanito Reseco in the mid-1880's. If Antonio Reyes is about twenty-five years old in 1885, then he would have been born about 1860. This apparently minor detail helps substantiate our earlier statement

¹⁶ According to Beser, *Sinfonía de dos novelas*, p. 1.

¹⁷ (Madrid, 1916). All quotes from the novel refer to this volume.

¹⁸ Beser points this out in *Sinfonía de dos novelas*, p. 12.

that the action of *Su único hijo* takes place in the early 1860's or, perhaps, even a few years earlier.

In the first three chapters of *Una medianía*, Clarín presents us with portraits of three characters: Elías Cofiño, Augusto Rejoncillo and Antonio Reyes. Cofiño, a native of Vigo who made his fortune in the book trade in America, now lives in Madrid with his daughter Rita whom he hopes some day to marry to a "literato, y bastante conocido" (p. 309). (It is interesting to note that Bonifacio Reyes hoped that his son would grow up to be a famous composer or writer.) Rejoncillo, a handsome young man, skilled in oratory and ruthlessly ambitious, is interested in Rita because she is rich. Finally, Antonio is introduced in a brief two-page portrait which begins: "Antonio Reyes era un joven rubio, de lentes, delgado y alto; tosía mucho, pero con gracia; con una especie de modestia de enfermo crónico cansado de molestar al mundo entero" (p. 313). As Beser points out in his excellent study of the fragment,¹⁹ Reyes is presented mainly through the point of view of Rita, who misses his cough when he goes away to Paris. Like Rosario in *Esperaindeo*, Rita's feelings towards the young man are maternal in nature: "cada vez sentía más simpatía por aquel muchacho, y más deseo de cuidarle aquel catarro en que él parecía no pensar" (p. 313). The impression conveyed in these three introductory chapters which, as Beser notes, are temporally independent from the following four, is that Reyes and Rejoncillo will eventually be rivals for Rita's hand.

The same rivalry between the two men is found at the beginning of the main action, in chapter 4, only with an ironic twist: the woman is different. Antonio has returned from Paris and is hoping to seduce a wealthy married woman, Regina Theil who, it is rumored, has taken Rejoncillo as her lover. In chapters 4 through 6, Antonio takes leave of Regina and we follow him to the Suizo Nuevo, where he chats with Cofiño, and then along the Calle de Alcalá, the Carrera de San Jerónimo, to the Plaza del Sol, and finally to the Ateneo. There, as he sits and thinks, we are offered an intellectual portrait of this character whom Beser has described as "un intelectual que reacciona contra la sociedad que le rodea con una mueca negativa, cargada de desprecio, pero ineficaz socialmente." This intelligent but bitter and lazy individual with an introspective nature and a highly-developed superiority complex is Bonifacio Reyes' "único hijo," born in the final chapter of Alas's second novel.

Upon leaving the Ateneo, Antonio suddenly remembers that Regina is at the theater, and he catches a *berlina* to hasten to her. The final chapter of the fragment, which describes his trip to the theater, links the novel with *Su único hijo*. Stimulated by the smell of the coach and the noise of its windows

¹⁹ *Sinfonía de dos novelas*, p. 1. All other references to Beser in our discussion are from pages 1 and 12 of this article.

and wheels, Reyes remembers his childhood. Beser points out that the technique Clarín uses in this scene, in which Antonio's memories are stimulated by a sensation, is similar to Proust's use of the *madeleine*:

El run, run de los vidrios saltando sobre la madera, el ruido continuo y sordo de las ruedas, le iban sonando á canción de nodriza; gotas de la reciente tormenta, que aún resbalan en zig-zag por los cristales, tomaban de las luces de la calle fantásticos reflejos, y con refracciones caprichosas mostraban los objetos en formas disparatadas. Un olor punzante, indefinible, pero muy conocido (olor de coche de alquiler lo llamaba él para sus adentros), le traía multitud de recuerdos viejos; y se vió de repente sentado en la ceja de otro coche como aquél, á los cinco años, entre las rodillas de un señor delgado, que era su padre, su padre que le oprimía dulcemente el cuerpecito menudo con los huesos de sus piernas flacas y nerviosas. ¡Qué lejos estaba todo aquello! ¡Qué diferente era el mundo que veía entre sueños de una conciencia que nace, aquel niño precoz, del mundo verdadero, el de ahora!

Las rodillas del padre eran almohada dura, pero que al niño se le antojaba muy blanda, suave, almohada de aquella cabeza rubia, un poco grande, poblada de fantasmas antes de tiempo, siempre con tendencias á inclinarse, apoyándose, para soñar (p. 333).

Here, through the memories of his son, we see Bonifacio Reyes five years after the end of *Su único hijo*. After this introduction, we have a description of Antonio as a child:

había salido muy temprano una injusticia constante del mundo para con él. Nadie le apreciaba en lo que valía; nadie le conocía; sólo su padre le adivinaba, por amor. En la escuela, donde había puesto los pies muy pocas veces, otros ganaban premios con estrepitosos alardes de sabiduría infantil; él entraba, los pocos días que entraba, llorando; érale imposible recordar las lecciones aprendidas al pie de la letra; sabíalas mejor que los otros, estaba seguro de comprenderlas y el maestro siempre torcía el gesto, porque Antonio tartamudeaba y decía una cosa por otra (p. 334).

One senses here a degree of sympathy or identification between the narrator and his protagonist, something also found in *Su único hijo*.

Next, we find ourselves back in the Valcárcel house, as Antonio continues to recall his early years, still steeped in the same atmosphere of romantic literature that so permeates the pages of Clarín's second novel:

En las reuniones de familia, donde se celebraban improvisados certámenes de gracias infantiles, el chico de Reyes siempre quedaba oscurecido por sus primos, que saltaban mejor, declamaban escenas de

Zorrilla y García Gutiérrez, recitaban fábulas y tenían *salidas* graciosas. Se acordaba como si fueran de aquel instante, de los elogios fríos, de los besos helados con que amigos y parientes le acariciaban por complacer á su padre, que sonreía con tristeza y siempre acudía después de los otros á calentarle el alma con un beso fuerte, apretado y con un estrujón entre las rodillas temblonas y huesudas. Su padre comprendía que los demás no encontraban ninguna gracia en su hijo. A los demás se les olvidaba pronto y la familia entera se consagraba á cantar las alabanzas del diablejo de Alberto, del chistosísimo Justo, de Sebastián el sabio, que a los siete años anunciaban seguras glorias de la familia de los Valcárcel (pp. 334-35).

In the above passages it is curious to mark how Antonio, in his timidity, reminds us of Bonifacio. Effectively ostracized from society and friends, Antonio is joined to his father in a special feeling of love and warmth — one which is suddenly interrupted when, during his carriage ride, the memory of his mother appears before Antonio:

Emma Valcárcel se llamaba su madre.

La imagen de aquella mujer flaca, enferma, de una hermosura arruinada, que jamás había visto él en su esplendor de juventud sana y alegre, llenó el cerebro de Antonio. Este recuerdo fué un dolor positivo; no tenía la triste voluptuosidad alambicada de los otros.

"¡Mi madre!...", dijo en voz alta Reyes; y apoyó la cabeza en la fría y resquebrajada gutapercha que guarnecía el coche miserable. Encogió los hombros, cerró los ojos y sintió en ellos lágrimas. El ruido de los cristales y de las ruedas, más fuerte ahora, le resonaba dentro del cráneo; ya no era como canto de nodriza; tomó un ritmo extraño de un coro infernal, parecido al de los demonios en *El Roberto* (p. 335).

Here we have a glimpse of the egocentric, capricious and neurotic wife of Bonifacio in *Su único hijo*. It is the end of the chapter, and also of the fragment.

It is interesting to see how Clarín uses music as a motif to frame Antonio's memories: the sound of the coach reminds him of a *canción de nodriza* at the start, and this, in turn, brings to mind his father. By the end of the passage, the same noise, now mixed with his tears, takes on a rhythm similar to a chorus from hell in Meyerbeer's opera, *Robert le diable*.²⁰ In *Su único hijo*, music is also frequently used to reflect the protagonist's feelings.

²⁰ "El Roberto" can only be this opera by Meyerbeer, judging from the plot (Robert, Duke of Normandy, the son of a mortal woman and a devil, almost loses his soul to the devil — his father — when he gains the magical means to win his sweetheart at a midnight revel with ghosts. He eventually denounces his father, who returns to hell). There is, as is evident, much "devilish" music.

In his letter to Altamira, Alas used an architectural term to describe the relationship of *Su único hijo* to *Una medianía*: he called it a "peristyle" (a range of roof-supporting columns around a building or an open court). Beser observes that one of the more interesting aspects of this fragment, divided as it is into three chapters of "introduction" and four of actual plot, is "la preocupación constructiva que se muestra a través de sus páginas." This careful structuring of the novel is more than just internal; it also includes an ironic relationship to its "peristyle," as we shall see.

In the course of Antonio's ride to the theater, the narrator explains the importance that childhood memories hold for his protagonist:

Reyes atribuía á los recuerdos de su infancia un interés supremo; conservábalos con vigorosa memoria y con una precisión plástica que le encantaba; los repasaba muy á menudo como los cantos de un poema querido (pp. 333-34).

On one other occasion in the fragment (Chapter 5), he is stimulated by his present circumstances to remember the past:

Recordó que cuando era niño y se divertía cantando á solas ó declamando, si un importuno le interrumpía un momento, al volver á sus gritos y canciones ya lo hacía sin gusto, con desabrimiento y algo avergonzado, hasta dejar sus juegos y romper á llorar. Una impresión análoga sentía ahora: aquel tonto de don Elías le había hecho caer del quinto cielo; le había hecho derrumbarse desde gratas ilusiones que halagaban la vanidad... á los cantos rodados de la crónica del día (p. 320).

His escape into the past reminds us of Bonifacio Reyes who, in *Su único hijo*, frequently escapes from reality by means of domestic fantasies of his own childhood. It appears that Antonio's past — his memories of childhood — were to have played an important role in *Una medianía* where they would offer a subjective view of him, thus deepening the reader's understanding of the young Reyes. The passages quoted above give us a far better idea of Antonio's past than is the case in *Su único hijo*, where Bonifacio's occasional reminiscences about his parents or youth are rather confused, reflecting his own inability to think clearly.

The "irony" of the relationship of *Una medianía* to *Su único hijo* involves the problem of point of view. A person who has read *Su único hijo* approaches its "second part" knowing a great deal about which Antonio seems to be unaware. Such a reader knows, for example, about Bonifacio's affair with the soprano, Serafina, and about the flirtation that took place between Emma Valcárcel and a baritone named Minghetti. This reader may also believe (as do most of the characters of the novel) that Bonifacio's only son, Antonio, is

illegitimate and that his real father was the baritone. At the same time, there is a space of twenty to thirty years between the main action of both novels, a gap which only Antonio's memories can fill for us, providing information about what happened between the time of his birth and the present. The sensation produced by such a subjective presentation of the past, exemplified by the description of his memories of his parents cited above, is peculiar indeed, because superimposed upon our own "objective" image of these characters we now have Antonio's feelings about them.

However — and this is important — Antonio is remembering not specifically the Bonifacio and Emma we *knew* in *Su único hijo*, but rather his father and mother about seven to ten years after we last saw them in the novel. Antonio's vision is further complicated by his tendency to transform reality:

La realidad, tal como era desde que él tenía recuerdos, le había parecido despreciable; sólo podía valer transformándola, viendo en ella otras cosas; la actividad era lo peor de la realidad; era enojosa, insustancial; los resultados que complacían á todos, le repugnaban; el querer hacer bien algo, era una ambición de los demás, pequeña, sin sentido (p. 334).

Like his father, Antonio is a dreamer. From this description and from the relationship between the two novels, it seems clear that "reality" is at once limited and impossible to approach with total objectivity. The span of time between *Una medianía* and its "peristyle" is long; a person who has read *Su único hijo* can, as the second novel progresses, partially recreate his own particular image of these years in his mind, an image which may well differ from his initial impressions of the first novel.²¹

This complex relationship between *Una medianía* and *Su único hijo* may explain, in part, the importance of generations in the earlier novel in which the pasts of both the Valcárcel and Reyes families are frequently emphasized. If we are to gain a greater understanding of Antonio Reyes through knowledge of his past — both his childhood (his own memories) and his "pre-history," including his supposed illegitimacy (*Su único hijo*) — then the more we know about his parents' pasts, the better we can comprehend Antonio. The same thing holds true in reverse: the more we know about Antonio, the more we can understand Bonifacio Reyes. Not only the Bonis who appears as a character in *Su único hijo*, but also Bonifacio as a father, a man who continues living

²¹ Clarín was well aware of the new developments in the novel during the late 1880's, including relativism in point of view, as evidenced by his review of Galdós's *Realidad* (see Sergio Beser, *Leopoldo Alas: Teoría y crítica de la novela española* [Barcelona, 1972], pp. 155-70. Clarín's essay on *Realidad* is also reprinted here (pp. 246-64).

after the close of the novel. Although this Bonis is never described in *Su único hijo*, his point of view is felt throughout the pages of the book.²²

We have seen that *Su único hijo* and *Una medianía* could have been read both as separate works and, because they complemented one another, "vertically" as a pair. It might be interesting, at this point, to speculate about the "horizontal" relationship between the three novels of the trilogy. The two fragments of *Esperaindeo* and *Una medianía* tell us almost nothing about the relationship between the works, other than the fact that the three protagonists were supposedly acquainted with one another. Menéndez y Pelayo, we recall, was curious enough about Clarín's total plan to request further clarification in a letter. Like many of Alas's friends, Antonio Sánchez Pérez was aware of the existence of a larger project when he wrote, in his review of Alas's second novel, that *Su único hijo* was a fragment of "no sé que grandioso edificio, que Clarín está levantando" (*Madrid Cómico*, August 22, 1891). Sánchez Pérez was a close personal friend, and it is likely that Alas discussed his plan with him. It is therefore significant that in his review Sánchez Pérez, too, used an architectural term, "grandioso edificio," recalling Clarín's description of *Su único hijo* as a peristyle. Structure, it would seem, was of utmost importance in his total conception.

With this in mind, let us consider the possible relationship between the three novels. Although psychologically the relationship between *Su único hijo* and *Una medianía* is logical in a "vertical" way, as we have seen, architecturally, it may seem illogical to have a trilogy of three separate novels all introduced by a work which is directly related to only one of the three. In the terminology of art history, instead of a unified "triptych" supported by a single base, we would have three separate "panels," only one of which would rest on its base (its prehistory). If the novels were indeed meant to form a "triptych" — that is to say, to be "hinged" together or interconnected — then Clarín would have intended to create a structural relationship between them which would

²² Bonifacio Reyes is a dreamer who is unable to live in the more linear time of *Su único hijo* without escaping into his own psychic and highly personal time. Early in the novel (ch. 5) two important observations are introduced which suggest that even Bonifacio's "present" may be viewed from the perspective of a mature Bonifacio who is remembering the entire main action instead of living it. On one occasion, the moment he catches Serafina's eye in a rehearsal is described as follows: "muchas veces, muchas, pensando después [italics mine] en aquel momento solemne de su vida, tuvo que confesarse que impresión más dulce ni tan fuerte no la había experimentado en toda su juventud tan romántica por dentro" (Alianza Editorial, p. 42). Several pages later his audacity at having asked Emma's uncle for a loan is recalled by an older Bonifacio: "Años después [italics mine], recordando aquel golpe de audacia para el cual sólo el amor podía haberle dado fuerzas, lo que más admiraba en su temeraria empresa era el piquillo de su pretensión, los doscientos reales en que su demanda había excedido a su necesidad. '¿Por qué pedí mil reales en vez de ochocientos?' No se lo explicó nunca" (p. 45).

have allowed them to somehow "stand" together on the same central "base." Perhaps he was inferring this when he mentioned, in two letters, a "third part" to *Su único hijo*.

We know that the three protagonists were probably friends, and from the information we have about them, we also know that they were extremely different as human beings. In his October 6, 1891 letter to Menéndez y Pelayo, Clarín described the witty, intellectual and ironic Juanito Reseco as "superior a Antonio y es el egoísmo absoluto y de talento sin ocupación, lo que acaba de llamar un novelista ruso 'el genio sin cartera.'" Esperaindeo seems to have been quiet and sensitive. In the same letter, Alas tells us really nothing about him: "El otro amigo es 'Esperaindeo', que da nombre a otra novela. Esta, primero, fué *drama* y acaso sirva para las tablas, pero ¡con esos cómicos! Sobre todo ¡con esas cómicas!" (*Epistolario*, pp. 53-54). Alas indicated a good deal of sympathy for both Reseco and Esperaindeo, as we have seen. Antonio Reyes is lazy, negative, introspective and "superior," but in the excerpts quoted earlier we noted a degree of sympathy or identification on the narrator's part. The differences between these "*tres mosqueteros psicológicos*" remind us of the differences within Leopoldo Alas himself, as evidenced throughout his works. They are even reflected in *Su único hijo* — "novela entre analítica, sentimental y humorística," as Clarín himself described it. Throughout this novel one finds a duality: a dark, pessimistic and critical vision reminiscent, at times, of some of Clarín's most bitter satirical pieces, such as "Mis plagios," and a tenderness and sympathy seen in stories such as "La ronca" or "Doña Berta." Antonio Reyes, both negative and sensitive, is the product of this divided vision. Psychologically speaking, his two friends are far "healthier" individuals who seem more at ease in society and in the world.

Each of these three characters was to have his own novel. And yet, if we are to judge from the fragment of *Una medianía*, they cross over into one another's lives, just as the characters of many of Galdós's *novelas contemporáneas* do from time to time in different books. The "evidence" of such a crossover is found in chapter 4 of the fragment, in which Cofiño and Antonio Reyes discuss Juanito Reseco at the café. Reyes, annoyed because of something said earlier and reacting to Cofiño's praise of Reseco with what would to be a touch of jealousy, says: "—Reseco . . . , ¡ps! . . . , en tierra de ciegos . . . En París Reseco sería uno de tantos muchachos de *sprit*; aquí es el terror de los tontos y de los Celestinos" (p. 318).

From this conversation, it would seem that not only do the three men probably appear in each other's novels, but also that Clarín was interested in portraying the *opinion* they have of one another. By itself, this is nothing new because Alas was always interested in the judgments characters have of each other (*La regenta* being a most excellent example). But if this kind of point of view crosses over between novels, with the protagonist of one novel

suddenly becoming a secondary character in another, the situation becomes more complicated. Is it possible that the three novels were intended to have been connected not simply by means of the relationship between the three protagonists, but also by the device of point of view? If this is true, then they were to have been related "horizontally" in time in a way similar to the "vertical" link between *Su único hijo* and *Una medianía* and reality would have become very complex indeed. The "architectural" quality of the trilogy thereby would have been reinforced in such a way as to complement the "architectural" relationship between *Una medianía* and its "peristyle."

But why then, we must ask, did Clarín choose to give a "base" or pre-history to *Una medianía* instead of to one of the other two? Since his letters strongly suggest that he was having problems with *Una medianía*, it is quite possible that he put the novel aside for a while and worked on its "introduction" first, hoping thereby to be able to tackle the second novel once again. But perhaps the psychological "health" of the three protagonists can also provide an answer to this question. From what information we have, both Esperaindeo and Juanito Reseco are able to function in the world they live in. Antonio Reyes, on the other hand, is less "well-adjusted." He has what Beser calls "la extraña mezcla de rebeldía negativa, filantropía y aristocratismo de la inteligencia," a mixture that we find in "Osorio, Azorín, César Moncada, Baroja, Maeztu, Unamuno, Pío Cid, Joaquín Costa y todos los hombres y personajes que marcan el salto del siglo XIX al XX." Beser places such men within a larger framework, as "unos hijos directos de los hombres del salto XVIII-XIX, angustiados por la impotencia de sus fuerzas" (*Sinfonía de dos novelas*, p. 12).

In his anguished feeling of impotence in dealing with his surroundings and with his own existence, Antonio Reyes is very much a precursor of the Generation of 1898. Another point of contact between them, as Beser points out, is found in his negative reaction to the world around him and in his tendency to escape into dreams and inactivity, as we saw in a passage quoted earlier. Therefore, it is not surprising that Antonio Reyes' solution to "life" is related to the title of his novel. As Alas says in his letter to Menéndez y Pelayo: "Antonio Reyes, es la medianía que acaba por suicidarse cuando adquiere la evidencia de esa medianía que es" (*Epistolario*, p. 54). "Juanito Reseco," he adds, as if anticipating don Marcelino's question (while at the same time reinforcing our judgment of this character's psychological stability), "no se suicida."

Antonio Reyes commits suicide. For this reason his novel is the central panel of the "triptych." The contrast between the manner in which the other two protagonists deal with reality and Reyes' inability to do so give an added perspective to his choice. At last the full depth of the relationship between *Su único hijo* and *Una medianía* can be perceived because Antonio's death is the *end* of all those generations of Reyes before him. His father's romantic dream of a famous son who would become a poet or a musician — a "gran

hombre de genio" — has, in fact, destroyed itself. The means by which this has occurred is, ironically, the most "romantic" of all: suicide. In this way Antonio Reyes unwittingly reflects the anguish of the "true" romantics of the nineteenth-century, the ones to whom Beser referred. Therefore we can appreciate more fully the emphasis on generations in *Su único hijo* which, as Alas hastened to inform Menéndez y Pelayo, "no viene a ser más, en efecto, que una *introducción* [italics mine]" (*Epistolario*, p. 54). We can also understand the symbolism of the name which Bonifacio's son receives because, with Antonio Reyes' death, the long line of the illustrious don Antonio Diego Valcárcel y Meras has, symbolically speaking, finally reached its end.

Finally, we can appreciate, from the point of view of the son now instead of that of his father, the importance of the paternity question in *Su único hijo* and Clarín's intentional ambiguity on this point. Although readers and critics of this novel have for years taken for granted that Emma Valcárcel had an affair with Minghetti and that her child was therefore illegitimate, the narrator never specifically states that this is the case although he explicitly informs us that Bonifacio makes love to his wife on several occasions, creating, instead, an atmosphere of gossip and insinuations which only *suggests* that the child was not Bonifacio's.²³ Is it not possible, considering the close relationship between the two novels as well as Antonio's tendency to dream about the past and to transform reality, that his final realization of his own "mediocrity" and his subsequent suicide could have been caused, in part, perhaps, by somebody telling him that he was "illegitimate" and his believing that this was so? Given his tender feelings towards his father and his painful memories of his mother, such a discovery could well have driven him to take his own life.

It has been suggested that Bonifacio Reyes, in his anguish, is an anticipation of the protagonists of the Generation of 1898. This is true, but he is also the father of a character who, both emotionally and intellectually, is a spiritual "brother" of Andrés Hurtado, as Beser has noted. It has been suggested, too, that *Su único hijo* and Bonifacio Reyes reflect a personal crisis which Clarín was experiencing in the late 1880's. This is also true; but there is, as well, a very strong connection between Alas's emotional, intellectual, spiritual and physical state in these years and the fact that this trilogy was never completed. Quite possibly the reason why *Una medianía* never entered the creative phase which Alas called "el período de ferrocarril" was that it was simply too painful for him to write it.

In the final scene of *Su único hijo*, when Bonifacio is confronted by his former mistress, Serafina, who tells him "what everyone knows" — that Minghetti is the father of his son — Bonifacio strongly affirms his faith in his only

²³ Recent articles by Cesáreo Bandera and Carlos Feal Deibe have treated the problem of paternity in *Su único hijo* at length (see note 3).

son. Cesáreo Bandera's interpretation of the ending of the novel is especially interesting with respect to what we have seen here:

Se ha dicho que Bonifacio representa la inadecuación de un romanticismo trasnochado a la realidad de la España de finales de siglo, lo cual es cierto. Sin embargo, la verdadera pregunta que se plantea Alas en esta obra es la siguiente: ¿Y después? Cuando se venga abajo la última ilusión romántica, ¿qué quedará? La visión que Alas nos anticipa no puede ser más pavorosa: el vacío total, un mundo de seres que se aniquilan a sí mismos en un afán constante por aniquilar a los demás. Sólo la voz angustiada y trágica de Bonifacio clama desde lo más profundo de ese vacío, en un último y desesperado esfuerzo por aferrarse a su única tabla de salvación, a *Su único hijo* ("La sombra de Bonifacio Reyes," p. 225).

If *Su único hijo* represents the search and hope for faith, *Una medianía* is the complete disillusionment. Perhaps the necessity Alas felt to write *Su único hijo* before *Una medianía* reflects a need on his part to understand, and even justify, the negative and rebellious Antonio Reyes. His suicide, however, would symbolize the destruction of Bonifacio's only hope, and we would indeed be left with "el vacío total." Quite possibly this prospect so appalled Leopoldo Alas (who, himself, was going through a period of tremendous pessimism and doubt) that he could not bring himself to describe it. And without the "center panel" of his "triptych," he may have eventually lost interest in, and a reason to finish, the "panels" on either side.