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La novela de los tres: An early Freudian experiment. (Critical Essay) Connie Green.

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It is well-known that the early decades of the twentieth-century were years of daring literary experimentation. In Colombia, the period between 1925 and 1935 was pivotal in the modernization of its society and the formation of its vanguard novel. The common perception is that Colombia lacked a true avant-garde and its novel was inconsequential in an overall consideration of Latin American vanguard literature. However, writers such as Eduardo Zalamea Borda, Jose Felix Fuenmayor, Cesar Uribe Piedrahita and Jose Restrepo Jaramillo are representative of those less conventional Colombian novelists who were willing to challenge the nation's official cultural and literary traditions by incorporating various vanguard strategies and ideologies into their works, thus incorporating Colombia into the international avant-garde.

If as some critics claim, Restrepo Jaramillo is the founder of the Colombian psychological novel, his *La novela de los tres* (1) may well be the first of this type to be published. (2) The concern with the multiplicity of the self is the thematic focal point. Restrepo Jaramillo centers his attention on Freudian psychoanalytic theories, (3) as he artistically strives to find an integrity of self through the understanding of the conflictive voices within his own psyche. In the avant-garde spirit, he departs from inherited plot conventions and character formations, utilizing various self-conscious textual strategies--multiple narrators, metacritical commentaries, the confusion of fiction and reality--intended to draw attention not only to the narrative devices employed but also to the problematics of novelistic creation. The focus is on its gestation through the multiple acts of writing and reading which take place among the narrator and his characters as each one vies physically and psychologically to control the creation of this work.

The story begins in a room in a pension with the nameless narrator waiting for Jorge, a clerk in a bookstore, to pass by. In the first series of chapters, numbered 1 through 8, we learn that the narrator, with the aid of his friend, Octavio, is attempting to write a novel about Jorge's life. The central interest of these chapters is the matrix of difficulties experienced by the narrator in shaping the novel. The sketchy details of Jorge's existence count as almost nothing. Chapter 8 ends with the same words which began Chapter 1: "Y segui esperando" (41). The second part of the novel, lettered A through J, retells the story but adds those changes made during the narrator's absence by an unknown intruder. As the narrator reads the corrected version, he recorrects it while commenting on the intruder's revisions in a technical as well as a psychological sense. The following three chapters, K through M, describe the narrator's successful attempt at finding the intruder (Jorge). The final chapter, entitled "Epilogo semitriste," concludes with the words "Hay que vivir," (85) emphasizing Jorge's final demise.

As stipulated in the title, this is a novel written, not by one, but by three character-authors: the narrator, Octavio, and Jorge. Moreover, it is not one, but three novels--a first draft or an original version; a second, corrected version; and a third, revised and finished product, the only one which will be left unchanged by the characters in the story. It becomes clear that Restrepo Jaramillo composed this novel not only to affirm his modernity in a literary context, but also to show the psychic process involved in its very formation. Although each of the three principal characters remains independent, the

reader becomes aware of the confluence of personalities, the overlapping of roles, and their interrelationship. The various references to echoed words, mirrored gestures, and Octavio's sudden appearances and disappearances are clear indicators that these characters represent one individual's personality, divided into three separate yet interrelated entities. At one point in the novel, the narrator even mentions some "hilo incomprensible que viene hasta mi como alargado telepaticamente por Octavio invisible" (70). (4) Through careful analysis, it becomes evident that the author based this text upon Freud's psychoanalytic theories on the structure of the psyche. The novel's triadic nature appears to follow Freud's later and more definitive division of the psyche into a triad consisting of the id, ego, and super-ego, a structure which replaces, without canceling out, his earlier division of the mind into the unconscious, preconscious, and conscious. Within the proposed Freudian framework, the narrator plays the role of the id, which finds its place within the unconscious system. Herein lie the various instinctual drives, passions, repressed memories, and desires. His wish to realize artistically his fantasies and repressed desires in creating a novel is intertwined with his wish to alleviate anxiety and frustration through its production. The two objectives converge in a single desire to design a work by which he can release inner tension by dealing directly with repressed desires, and thereby join the ranks of the vanguard writers who have broken with tradition. Considering his particular place in the unconscious system, however, the narrator can only manifest these desires in dreams and neurosis. Therefore, the narrator relies on Octavio to assist him in bringing his desires and ideas to consciousness and contact with external reality in a written form. Octavio as the ego, modified by external reality and positioned between the unconscious and conscious worlds, must control the unregulated passions of the id while acting as a mediator between the id and the external world. In the process the narrator and Octavio must deal with a third agency, the super-ego formed by the ego out of the id. Jorge, designated to play this role, embodies all the ideals acquired from parents, teachers, priests, and other figures of authority. Internalizing the inhibiting forces of the outer world, he exercises his power of criticism and prohibition upon the id's instinctual drives. The conflict that arises between the id and the super-ego is uneasily brokered by the ego. Any attempt to suppress the id's undesirable fantasies results in a type of neurosis which manifests itself in feelings of guilt, shame, and anxiety in all three characters.

The narrator, as the principal creator of the story, represents the id. As the primary source of psychic energy, he is ruled, according to Freud, by the "pleasure principle," the sole function of which is to avoid pain and seek gratification. The creative act provides the narrator/id a release for this reservoir of stored-up energy and ideas. It also becomes the means to lower unpleasurable tension through the discharge of anxiety. This anxiety is a natural response to his attempt to initiate a new type of novel, free of the influence of antiquated literary traditions, "chilonas y vacias... aconsejadoras y biblicas," (75) and thereby rescue Colombian literature from, in the narrator's words, its "alarmante y doloroso estado de prostracion"(81). Literary criticism, an integral part of self-conscious literature, is seen in both the narrator's intentions and his systematic rejection of Octavio's cynical suggestion that he fashion a novel in the literary vein of Isaac's Romantic novel, Maria, and of Jorge's proposal to end the novel melodramatically with his own (Jorge's) suicide.

The first part of the novel focuses on a series of questions and problematic situations related to its composition. The narrator hopes to realize his innermost fantasies, via the uninhibited freedom of the imagination, and to overcome this alienation by circumventing the repressive nature of "civilization" with its code of logic and puritanical morality. The novel begins with the narrator in the midst of gathering material on a character (Jorge), who supposedly already exists outside the fictional world. Although he is determined not to compromise his literary integrity, the narrator repeatedly regrets having chosen a weak man for his hero. To have chosen Jorge, an ordinary man devoid of noble ambitions, leaves the narrator disillusioned with his technical skills as a novelist. He experiences a deep sense of failure for his inability to shape Jorge into an energetic hero who can turn the narrator's fantasies into reality. Jorge does nothing and consequently his story has no sustained plot, no moments of exalted action, no real heroism. What the reader learns are simply fragments of the sad life of a provincial man haunted by a painful past, a man who works in a bookstore, writes poetry, and loves either a married woman, a female cousin, or a young man named Gabriel. Furthermore, if Jorge is only a projected image of the narrator's unconscious world, a substitute object for his own unsatisfied desires, it is a precarious image, a phantasmagoric reality which the narrator fears may dissolve into the silence and nothingness out of which it was created. However, for the narrator's ideas to materialize and reach consciousness, they must find connecting links to external reality. According to Freud, an unconscious idea or thought is carried out on unknown material, whereas a preconscious thought is, in addition, connected with word-presentations. Therefore, "anything arising from within (apart from feelings) that seeks to become conscious must try to transform itself into external perceptions" (19:20). Consequently, the narrator enlists the assistance of Octavio, who, assuming the role of the ego, acts as a mediator between the unconscious and the external world as well as between the id and the super-ego, the role played by Jorge. Octavio is entrusted to help the narrator distinguish between the subjective and the objective, between fantasy and reality. Once informed by the narrator of his project to write a novel about Jorge's life, Octavio is assigned the task of supplying the narrator with detailed information on Jorge's existence in the outside world. Since the narrator cannot know of external reality except through the preconscious activity of the ego, he depends on Octavio's skills and cooperation to observe Jorge's actions, to talk with him, and to learn of his ideas and feelings. At the same time, the narrator relies on Octavio's ability to organize efficiently and rationally the information in order to make the story, the external perception, more intelligible for the reader.

Although the narrator solicits Octavio's assistance, he simultaneously resents his interference and resists submitting to the ego's commonsensical rationalizations. (5) He resists to allow his story to be reduced to solely rational constructs and on several occasions he throws Octavio's notes into the garbage, considering them unworthy of a new literature. The narrator's fear of losing control over the making of the novel leads to his distrust of Octavio's real motives for his eager willingness to help. However, Octavio's desire to be loved by the narrator, who calls him a "buen animal siempre esclavo del amor (43), is reflected in his longing to please and aid him in achieving satisfaction, claiming he has an equal interest in seeing the novel completed. This desire is consistent with Freud's description of the ego as not only "a helper to the id; it is also a submissive slave who courts his master's love" (19: 56). But the narrator's fear is not

completely unfounded, for Octavio's desire to be loved extends to his attempt to please Jorge as well. In light of Freud's description of the ego, Octavio must be viewed "as a poor creature owing service to three masters and consequently menaced by three dangers: from the external world, from the libido of the id, and from the severity of the super-ego" (19:56).

Octavio may serve the narrator, but he also must guard himself against the id's impulsive ideas. (6) One way Octavio postpones the immediate release of the id's impulses and excitations is to stimulate the development of the super-ego, which, although it is an expression of the id's strongest impulses, exhibits its moral censorship upon them as an inhibiting agency. For Freud, the super-ego is a prolongation of the individual's earliest identification with his parents and later formation at the hands of teachers, priests, and other figures of authority regarding the moral precepts of sin and virtue (19: 37). The super-ego, Freud writes, is "not simply a residue of the earliest object choices of the id; it also represents an energetic reaction-formation against those choices" (19: 34). This presents a major obstacle to the narrator's desire to liberate himself from all repressive outside influences and to realize his innermost fantasies. He understands that he cannot easily manipulate Jorge to achieve this liberation. On the contrary, believing his hero so weak and innocuous, the narrator unwittingly underestimates Jorge's strength as a separate, critical agent able to suppress any and all immoral thoughts, and to impose his own super-moral code over the narrator's amoral one.

An autonomous creature with his own desires and ideas, Jorge, in his position as a censoring agency, reacts against the narrator's will to invent what he (Jorge) considers a solely fictional account of himself. Thus, during the narrator's absence--two months of absolute sterility--Jorge enters the narrator's room, undertakes the revisions, and creates another novel. In this second version (A-J), Jorge challenges the facts, the events, and the subjective interpretations of both the narrator and Octavio. Later, the extra-textual reader reads this second version along with the narrator--a reader himself--and shares in the narrator's anger and frustration while he attempts to reassemble the novel. The conflict between Jorge and the narrator essentially rests upon Jorge's provincial, Catholic, Romantic background and the narrator's cosmopolitan, progressive, modernistic spirit. Included among Jorge's corrections are the erasure of derogatory references to nineteenth-century novels like *Maria* and the substitution of the narrator's preferred authors such as Kipling and Pirandello with writers like Hugo Wast and Alfonso Castro. From an ethical standpoint, Jorge obliterates all references to immoral actions or thoughts, such as suggestions of his tentative love for a fifteen-year-old boy in order to align himself with the ideal resulting from his Catholic upbringing. Jorge superimposes this ideal version upon the narrator's irrational and sinful version before it reaches consciousness or publication, for Jorge is extremely apprehensive that the heightened intensity of this material, brought to the surface of consciousness by the narrator, might actually lead to satisfaction; thus, he must force this material back into complete unconsciousness. The resurrected memories of his past are too distressing for Jorge to remember and must be repressed a second time.

The adversarial relationship between Jorge and the narrator pits tradition against modernity, a fixed cultural heritage against a vanguard impulse in an artistic context, and instinctual impulses against repressive forces in a personal context. His refusal to help the narrator achieve his aims only causes further frustration for the narrator, who must try to

recreate the novel in its original form, and again impose his superior strength over the super-ego as well as over the ego, caught in the middle. The dialectical tension of wills among these characters/authors can only be resolved in mutual understanding. Once the narrator and Jorge meet face to face, they enjoy a momentary reconciliation through their common feeling of rancor towards Octavio, who they believe has betrayed them both: the narrator because Octavio informed Jorge of his secret novel; Jorge because Octavio entered his room and confiscated that portion of the poem that matches the part written on the narrator's manuscript. Thus, the narrator and Jorge are able to relieve themselves of guilt and blame by transferring both onto Octavio. With this common bonding, they feel free to negotiate an ending to the novel. (7)

The narrator and Jorge, however, cannot reach a compromised ending to the novel. The narrator refuses to accept Jorge's suggestions to finish the novel in a Romantic manner with Jorge's suicide, or to abandon this novel and begin another which Jorge argues would assure success. But the narrator insists he must finish this novel; he must find gratification for this particular need. Nor can Octavio help the narrator, although the narrator momentarily wishes he would reappear. For with the stronger forces of the id and the super-ego joined together, Octavio, fearing annihilation, has relinquished his power to maintain a harmonious balance among the three systems of personality and has disappeared from the scene. (8) Similarly, in pain, Jorge leaves after not being able to enforce his own ideal. The narrator, left alone to finish the novel, is still unsure how it should end. His one triumph over the instinct of self-destruction is his refusal to let his hero die. In the epilogue, however, the narrator claims to have found an ending which ironically becomes Jorge's death sentence. The three final words spoken by Jorge are the narrator's final revenge against his protagonist: "¡Hay que vivir!"

(1.) *La novela de los tres y varios cuentos* (Bogotá: Ediciones Colombia, 1926).

(2.) There is some discussion as to whether Antonio Alvarez Lleras's *Ayer, nada más* was actually the first true psychological novel written. But since it is unknown when the first edition was published (the second was 1930), this cannot be confirmed. Also, the critics who state that Restrepo Jaramillo introduced the psychological novel into Colombian literature are Javier Arango Ferrer (*Dos horas de literatura colombiana* [Antioquia, Colombia: Ediciones La Tertulia, 1963] 6: 79) and Antonio Curcio Altamar (*Evolución de la novela en Colombia* [Bogotá: Instituto Caro y Cuervo, 1957] 233). To date, however, I have found no critical analysis of *La novela de los tres*, only the passing comments by the above mentioned critics as to its psychological/psychoanalytical nature.

(3.) *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, 24 vols., trans. and ed., James Strachey (London: Hogarth, 1966-74).

(4.) The narrator uses the words "thread" and "ball of thread" several times as an indicator of some continuous line connecting him to other characters, ideas, or associations. Not only does Freud speak of a patient "spinning a thread" of associations in his essay "Repression" (14:150), but also Bergson compares his inner life to a continual rolling up like thread on a ball and "duration" as a multiplicity of moments bound to each other by a unity which goes through them like a thread (see Richard Elhnan and Charles Fiedelson, eds. *The Modern Tradition: Backgrounds of Modern Literature* [New York: Oxford UP, 1965] 727-28).

(5.) See Freud's essay "The Ego and the Id" (19: 25), where he speaks of the ego's endeavors to substitute the id's unbridled passions with more reasonable tendencies.

(6.) Since the unconscious processes pay little attention to "reality," part of the ego's function is to set up what Freud labels "reality--testing" as a means to distinguish between what is real and what is pure illusion. See Freud's essays, "The Unconscious" (14:188) and "A Metapsychological Supplement to the Theory of Dreams" (14: 231).

(7.) This common bonding occurs, according to Freud, when "two wishful impulses whose aims must appear to us incompatible become simultaneously active, the two impulses do not diminish each other or cancel each other out, but combine to form an intermediate aim, a compromise" ("The Unconscious" 14: 186).

(8.) Freud affirms that "since the ego's work of sublimation results in a defusion of the instincts and a liberation of the aggressive instincts in the super-ego, its struggle against the libido exposes it to the danger of maltreatment and death" ("The Ego and the Id" 19:56). Thus, feeling this threat, Octavio has developed the "flight-reflex"; and perhaps, seeing himself deserted and alone, unable to overcome the danger of annihilation by means of his own strength, has let himself die. In any case, Octavio does not reappear.