



The Politics of Pretence: Woman and Nation in Laura Restrepo's *Delirio*

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ABSTRACT: This article examines the interrelationships among the text's major themes: violence, dissimulation and delirium, at both the level of nation and also of family and individual. The dysfunctional character of the Loudoño family is reflected in the plight of the nation: while Agustina is the chief victim of her father's violent outbursts, so the nation is traumatized by the violent outrages committed by the criminal 'father', Pablo Escobar. Restrepo shows how, in these circumstances, madness takes its place on the inside of Colombian culture, ceasing thereby to be a state of exception. It is pretence that drives Agustina mad; but Restrepo's novel is not one-sidedly negative. She locates the possibility of a new order in Agustina's challenge to patriarchal power through her defiance of her father and through her *don de escribir* that provides a gender-inflected counterpoint to her mother's *don de encubrir*. Particular emphasis is given to the narrative reconstruction of the climactic scene when familial tensions finally spill over: though truth is revealed, the pretence survives unscathed. But Agustina's own narrative provides a countervailing force: her language declines to conform to the syntax of reason, assuming instead the rhythms of madness. This madness can be seen as creative, a mode of escaping the patriarchal furrow of the male symbolic order and spurious male rationality.

KEY WORDS: Laura Restrepo; Colombia; Gender; Patriarchy; Madness; Lacan; Pablo Escobar; Drug Violence; Jealousy; Phantom; José Eustasio Rivera

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RESUMEN: *La política de la simulación: mujer y nación en "Delirio" de Laura Restrepo.*- Este artículo analiza las relaciones entre los temas más importantes del texto: la violencia, el disimulo y el delirio, tanto a nivel de nación como a nivel de individuo y de familia. El carácter disfuncional de la familia Loudoño se refleja en el estado lamentable de la nación: así como Agustina es la víctima principal de los arrebatos violentos de su padre, la nación queda traumatizada como resultado de las atrocidades cometidas por el "padre" criminal, Pablo Escobar. Restrepo demuestra cómo, en estas circunstancias, la locura se insinúa en el interior de la cultura colombiana, dejando de ser de ese modo un estado excepcional. Lo que enloquece a Agustina es el disimulo; pero la novela de Restrepo no es totalmente negativa. Identifica la posibilidad de un nuevo orden en el desafío al poder patriarcal representado por su resistencia a su padre y en su *don de escribir* que ofrece un equivalente sexual al *don de encubrir* a su madre. Se enfatiza especialmente la reconstrucción narrativa de la escena culminante cuando se desbordan las tensiones familiares; aunque se revela la verdad, el disimulo sobrevive ileso. La narrativa de Agustina representa una fuerza compensatoria: su lenguaje se niega a ajustarse a la sintaxis de la razón, asumiendo en su lugar los ritmos de la locura. Se puede interpretar tal locura como una fuerza creativa, una manera de salir del "surco" patriarcal del orden simbólico masculino basado en una racionalidad falsa.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Laura Restrepo; Identidad sexual; Patriarcado; Locura; Lacan; Pablo Escobar; Violencia del tráfico de drogas; Celos; Fantasma; José Eustasio Rivera

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INTRODUCTION

Delirio (Restrepo, 2004)* is the work that has brought Laura Restrepo (Colombia, 1950) the greatest critical acclaim to date, winning for her the Premio Alfaguara in the same year.¹ She is the author of *La isla de la pasión* (Restrepo, 1989) that reconstructs the history of the Mexican settlement in the island of Clipperton (located 500 miles off Acapulco, in the Pacific Ocean) and treats the themes of exile and survival; and of several other major texts set in Colombia: *Dulce compañía* (Restrepo, 1995) that moves into the supernatural realm with a female journalist falling in love with an angel whose stunning physical beauty and mythical aura are counterbalanced by a prominent set of profane characteristics: inordinate sexual appetite, autism and epilepsy; and *La novia oscura* (Restrepo, 1999a), dealing with female desire, suffering and endurance in a postcolonial setting. *Delirio* is also set in Colombia. It is preoccupied –like *La novia oscura*– with gender issues, and shares *Dulce compañía*’s defiance of rationality and logic. But it represents very much a new departure since, for the first time, Restrepo’s main theme is madness or delirium –as indicated by the title– at the level of nation and of individual. Just as Colombian national integrity is compromised by violence, corruption and pretence, so the Loudoño family, is dysfunctional, held together not by love and loyalty but rather by collective dissimulation. The outcome is –superficially– similar in each case: social hysteria undermines the nation while the family is afflicted by madness that recurs across the generations,² culminating in that of the protagonist, the beautiful Agustina Loudoño. In this respect, *Delirio* can be compared with *La novia oscura* where, according to Lindsay, the ‘individual and the collective are interwoven in such a way [...] that the novel functions precisely as a kind of ‘counterforce’ [...] to the amnesia affecting present day Colombia’ (Lindsay, 2003: 50). In *Historia de un entusiasmo*, Restrepo refers to the violence of Colombian society and notes among its diverse consequences the effect on women who “caían en profundas crisis psicológicas” (Restrepo, 1999b: 150). *Delirio* presents a stunning aesthetic representation of the conflict focusing on those aspects that, as Molano indicates, “se resistían a ser enclaustrados en el texto científico y aséptico de un informe” (quoted in O’Bryen, 2008: 83). The link between family and society is provided by Midas McAlister, the social upstart friend of Agustina’s elder brother, Joao, who abandons her after making her pregnant. He acts as the financial intermediary between Agustina’s father and the drug lord, Pedro Escobar, this relationship representing the increas-

ing dependence of the old agrarian classes on the new cocaine elites. Agustina’s psychological instability is clearly related to the national delirium of Colombia that often impinges on her consciousness, as when she notices the holes in the shutters: “los francotiradores del Nueve de Abril han abierto esos agujeros en los postigos de nuestra casa” (Restrepo, 2004: 135) –a reference to the assassination of the charismatic Liberal politician, Jorge Eliécer Gaitán on that day in 1948. As Liriot (2005, 72) observes, “Agustina ha estado loca siempre, igual que toda su familia y toda la sociedad que la rodea”. Given the prevalence of such topics, it is unsurprising that certain archetypal scenes of psychoanalysis such as the male attempts to interpret and control the female hysteric, together with often oblique references to Lacanian concepts, should insinuate themselves into the narrative.

The efforts of Agustina to protect her brother, Bichi, –whom she addresses as “mi amor” [28]– from their father, Carlos Vicente, are ultimately unsuccessful. The rift between father and son becomes irrevocable following the father’s violent reaction to what he regards as his son’s effeminate behaviour –an outburst that provokes the son’s revelation of the father’s adultery with his sister-in-law, Sofi. The departure of both the son, Bichi and of the sister-in-law, Sofi, allows the family to survive, the wronged wife, Eugenia, repudiating incontrovertible photographic evidence of her husband’s infidelity. Caught up in this family drama are Agustina’s men: Aguilar, her husband, whose love for her remains strong despite her psychological withdrawal from him, and Midas McAlister, her former boyfriend. Driven by resentment of his social inferiority to the Loudoños, Midas accumulates illicit wealth but is forced to return to his mother’s modest apartment when he falls foul of his symbolic father, Pablo Escobar. In slighting Escobar’s cousins by denying them access to his health club, Midas commits the one offence that Escobar cannot forgive: “las ofensas contra la familia son las únicas que él no perdona” [300]. It is the supremacy of such figures as Pablo Escobar in the criminal arena and of Carlos Vicente in the domestic space that contaminates the nation itself, producing a supercharged theatrical society where those unable to conform to the rules descend into a state of psychic alienation, conveniently labelled madness by mainstream opinion. In the context of this society, however, madness is far from being a state of exception; it approximates rather to social norm, occupying a position of inclusion and becoming the inside of Colombian culture. Doris Sommer has noted that a nation is like a family, “founded on mutual love that insures its continuing stability and productivity [...]”. Part of the conjugal romance’s national project, perhaps its main component, is to produce legitimate offspring,

* Figures between brackets along the text refer to the pagination of this work in the edition quoted in the References section.

literally to engender civilization. Romance also “valorizes virility as a uniquely male attribute by definition” (Sommer, 1986: 61) The fatal flaws in Restrepo’s romance are symptomatic of a divided nation: mutual love is absent in the marriage of Eugenia and Carlos Vicente and while they themselves have three legitimate offspring, the continuation of the family line is in doubt given Agustina’s abortion and Bichi’s homosexuality.

The Loudoño family is, in fact, a collection of outsiders. Agustina herself is isolated because she does not share her society’s obsession with money-making: Aguilar “le reprocha a Agustina su consuetudinaria indiferencia hacia las actividades productivas, que simplemente no van con ella” [62]. She does not marry someone of her own social class but rather a man sixteen years her senior who is regarded by her family as a “manteco”, defined by Aguilar himself as “un clasemedio impresentable, un profesor de mediopelo [...]” [32]. Aguilar confirms his own status as outsider by giving up his university post to take a job selling dog food which will give him time to look after Agustina. As a homosexual, Agustina’s brother, Bichi, is beyond the pale in a conservative, machista society; her mother, Eugenia, has a phobia for all things sexual and is in reality estranged from her adulterous husband, Carlos Vicente, despite presenting, as a brilliant exponent of keeping up appearances, a show of normal family life.

Agustina herself feels ignored by her father whose attention is focused on her brothers. Denied the affection of the man she idolizes (“yo voy a salir con mi padre” [113], she takes revenge for his neglect by carefully calibrating his jealousy of her boyfriends and savours his agonizing speculations about what might have gone on in the car of one of them –she had in fact touched the boy’s erect member and felt its waxen texture [213]. In both instances she exercises control: in the latter, by inverting gender roles since it is she who takes the initiative; and, in the other, by means of careful calculation, she manipulates the father as representative of the phallocentric order. She also controls her brother, Bichi, while acknowledging that there were “islas de la vida en las que cree que no me necesita” [61].

FAMILY AND NATION: THE RETURN OF THE REPRESSED

One of the major strands in Restrepo’s national and familial saga is jealousy which, as Rosemary Lloyd states, underpins the emergence of a universe “in which time, place, and language are distorted in such a way as to replicate the contours of the passion itself”; this passion “becomes a metaphor for all the forces of chaos that threaten to disrupt what we take for normality and reality [...]”

(Lloyd, 1995: 2). Jealousy is ingrained in the family, blighting the relationship of Agustina’s maternal grandparents, Nicolás and Blanca. The much older Nicolás is unsure of his wife [106] and the arrival of the young musician, Farax, provides fertile ground for jealousy [220–21]; Blanca is herself jealous of Farax because of Nicolás’s approval of him [223]. “Farax se ha convertido en el sueño y en la pesadilla de ambos, en el amor y en el rival de ambos en una espiral que asciende hasta donde el aire es tan fino que se vuelve irrespirable” [291]. Social jealousy also affects some of the characters: despite his bravado, Midas McAllister is certainly susceptible to it. Though he rises from poverty to enjoy an extravagantly affluent life-style, he retains his sense of inferiority to the “old-moneys de Bogotá” [28] and points out to Agustina that Escobar’s rise to the pinnacle of wealth in Colombia was driven by jealousy: “él nacido en el tugurio, criado en la miseria, siempre apabullado por la infinita riqueza y el poder absoluto de los que por generaciones se han llamado ricos [...]” [82]. Ironically, Escobar’s new found status as the country’s richest man provides him with self-deflationary insight rather than lasting satisfaction: “Qué pobres son los ricos de este país [...]” [82].

Jealousy shares many characteristics with madness: it is irrational, distorts perspectives and is obsessive. It is a strong contributing factor to the dysfunctional state of the Loudoño family that is almost torn apart by Carlos Vicente’s ready recourse to physical violence –inevitably recalling the conduct of national politics– to enforce his uncompromising demands, notably that his younger son be a *macho* figure like himself, and by Eugenia’s unlimited capacity for deception and self-deception which, ironically, serves to mitigate the consequences of the crisis occasioned by Bichi’s revelation of the photographs.

It is the mother and father, Carlos Vicente and Eugenia, who are chiefly responsible for family discord, leading Aguilar to comment: “Agustina, vida mía, esa familia tuya siempre ha sido un manicomio” [150]. The Loudoño family is locked into a pattern of dysfunctional behaviour affecting male members as well as female. At one extreme, on the female side, is Ilse, sister of Nicolás, who cannot repress her sexual urges even in the company of others. While she represents female excess, her niece, Eugenia (mother of Agustina) is dysfunctional at the other extreme, displaying a horror of sexuality and suppressing normal feelings such as pain and jealousy when her husband’s infidelity comes to light. To his sister-in-law, Sofi, Carlos Vicente is not a bad man even if he is a limited one, being devoted to philately and *Playboy* magazine. He is frustrated in his marriage since Eugenia’s beauty is inadequate recompense [123] according to her sister. This leads to his infidelity with his sister-in-law, Sofi, but if his relationship

with Eugenia is less than ideal, so too is that with his daughter, Agustina, and his son, Bichi. He displays an unhealthy jealousy towards Agustina despite her unhealthy subservience to him; and he resents his younger son because of his effeminate behaviour. Like Eugenia he lives by appearances but his public propriety is cast aside when he socializes with Sofi while Eugenia is away: “si hubieras visto a Carlos Vicente, tan figurín de sociedad que parecía que se hubiera tragado un paraguas, pues en el anonimato del sur aflojaba [...]” [126]. This is ironic, of course, in the light of his uncompromising intolerance of perceived sexual impropriety in others, a quality he communicates to Eugenia who takes it to even greater extremes according to Sofi [246]. Eugenia’s obsession with appearances is also more extreme than Carlos Vicente’s, her neurotic character seemingly determined by her own abnormal family circumstances: her father, Nicolás, was subject to regular bouts of madness; his relationship with Eugenia was remote (partly anticipating that between Carlos Vicente and Agustina): “Eugenia no está acostumbrada a que su padre le dirija la palabra” [306]. Eugenia suffers from multiple phobias: for the street [132] and the “chusma” [136]; and even for female bodily functions: when Agustina has her first period she anticipates her mother’s reproachful attitude, seeing her “como se mira a quien hace algo sucio, a quien Ensucia-con-su-sangre” [169]; she dismisses the maid, Aminta, purely because she is pregnant, prompting Sofi to comment on her horror of sexuality, not only of that of other people but also of her own [245]. There is the strong suggestion here of the transmission of psychosexual traits across generations. Not only was her father, Nicolás, prone to madness, but Ilse, her aunt, suffered from “quiet madness, o insania que se desenvuelve en silencio” [269]. Her genital itch, often relieved in public, gave rise to masturbation (“desata una ansiedad semejante al deseo pero más intenso” [267], much to the shame of her family who punished her by tying her hands behind her back. Restrepo portrays a kind of family romance marked by incestuous bonds –both literal and figurative– and generational doubling. Just as Agustina’s grandfather, Nicolás Portulín, seeks to set free his sister, Ilse, who is tied to her chair as punishment for her inability to control her sexual urges, so Agustina herself seeks to protect her homosexual brother, Bichi, from the violence of their homophobic father, Carlos Vicente. While Nicolás is twice the age of his wife, Blanca [36], so Agustina’s husband, Aguilar, is substantially her senior, by sixteen years [63]. The madness of Nicolás, anticipates, then, that of his granddaughter, Agustina, while his homosexual fantasies crystallize in the unambiguous sexual orientation of his grandson, Bichi.

Eugenia may be suffering from the phantom of Ilse: “What returns to haunt is the ‘unsaid’ and ‘unsayable’ of *an other*. The silence, gap, or secret in

the speech of someone else ‘speaks’, in the manner of a ventriloquist, through the words and acts (readable as words) of the subject” (Rashkin, 1992: 28). The phantom is a trace of the intuited but unknown family secret transmitted across generations. Eugenia’s horror of sexuality may be motivated by her subconscious rejection of Ilse’s “shameful” sexual compulsions just as Agustina’s obsession with hands [225] manifest, for example, in her request to Aguilar to photocopy for her his own hand which she keeps as a laminated image called “La mano que toca” [227; 339], may derive from the same source: Nicolás used force to stop Ilse, “para impedir que ella se llevara la mano allí abajo” [270]. Significantly, Agustina herself wears gloves, much to the annoyance of her brother, Joaco, as if to protect her hands from imagined impurities [265]. The link between Agustina and Ilse also emerges in the insatiable hunger both experience: Aguilar notes that when her “truce” ends, Agustina is consumed by “un hambre feroz que no puede ser saciada” [112]; Nicolás notices a similar quality in Ilse: “algo devorador e insaciable [...] iba siendo consumida por su propia hambre interior” [270–71]. Rashkin refers to a situation or drama that is transmitted without being stated and without the sender’s or receiver’s awareness of its transmission (Rashkin, 1992: 4). The phantom principle emerges overtly when Agustina, in her “original epifanía de la demencia” [198] that inaugurates her “territorial” phase when she demarcates her own domestic territory from that of Aguilar and Sofi –expects her now deceased father to return and visit her, leading Aguilar to remark that “pese a haber muerto hace años ahora resulta ser el oscuro huésped que permanence al acecho, el que lo desaloja de su propia casa y lo aparta de su mujer [...]” [208]. His greatest rival for Agustina’s affections “era el fantasma de ese padre de quien yo no podía hacerme siquiera una idea vaga [...]” [211].

Just as the family, particularly Agustina, is haunted by the ghosts of its past, so the nation is seemingly condemned to repeat some of the most unsavoury episodes of its own unenviable history. Hobsbawm remarks that in Colombia “the failure to make a social revolution had made violence the constant, universal, and omnipresent core of public life” (Hobsbawm, 2002: 373). The violent period (known as *La Violencia*) that blighted mid-century Colombia returned at the end of the century: “dos acontecimientos de duración prolongada [...] signan la historia colombiana en la segunda mitad del siglo XX: el período de la Violencia y el actual del narcotráfico” (Cardona López, 2000: 378). Modes of torture, killing, massacre and dispossession, similar to those pioneered in *La Violencia*, were reinstituted in late century (Hylton, 2006: 133). The *sicarios* of the 90s have been seen as reincarnations of the *Pájaros*, the assassins of the 40s, and the 1984 assassination of Lara Bonilla, President Betancur’s

Minister of Justice, ordered by Pablo Escobar, has been compared with the 1948 shooting of the Liberal politician, Jorge Eliécer Gaitán (see O'Bryen, 2008: 68; Ortega García, 2011: 105).

Agustina's relationship with her father, who was mainly responsible for her traumatic family experiences, can be related to the national experience of *La Violencia*. At one level, both Agustina and the nation have failed to address their traumas and instead surrendered, respectively, to individual and collective amnesia. But the failure to address the past (Agustina does this belatedly when she recounts the family crisis to Aguilar, as we shall see) explains the return of the father after his death and the insistence of *La Violencia* after its official ending. Amnesia is partial, however, and only covers up an underlying failure to forget –that consigns both individual and nation to circularity and repetition. The Loudoño family mirrors the nation in other respects too: García Márquez (1967) has famously portrayed the solitude of Colombia in *Cien años de soledad*; historians have made similar observations: “the fear of being alone, of solitude or *soledad*, appears to be a central driving force in Colombian history” (Braun, 2007: 46). Agustina's madness condemns her to a world that is impenetrable even to Aguilar: “Si Agustina me hablara, suspira Aguilar, si yo pudiera penetrar en su cabeza que ha vuelto para mí espacio vedado” [83]. The connections with Colombia, often seen as an *espacio vedado* by the international community, are clear. Tickner, for example, notes that during the Ernesto Samper administration of 1994–98, Colombia became identified as a pariah state in view of the central government's subservience in some regions to guerrilla control and paramilitary activity (Tickner, 2007: 336). Solitude also affects other family members, none more so than Eugenia, as Sofi is well aware: “la solitaria era Eugenia” [124]. Just as the nation is weak so the family is dysfunctional: both experience breakdown, the family with the departure of Bichi and Sofi, the nation through the endemic corruption of the 80s (when the action of *Delirio* is set): “parastate actors such as guerrilla movements, drug-trafficking organizations, paramilitary groups became legitimate forms of social organization, force, security and justice for ample sectors of the population” (Tickner, 2007: 333).

FAMILY AND NATION: WORLDS OF ARTIFICE

The pretence of the family also mirrors that of the nation: the theatrical culmination of the family's discord precipitated by Bichi's display of the compromising photographs of Sofi taken by Carlos Vicente can be seen as symptomatic of events on the national stage: Taussig describes the

Colombian state as “pretty much a farce, a theatrical affair of puppets and illusions, a house of mirrors for adroit swindlers to crawl around in and reap profits from the bloody conflict and its tireless staging of facades” (Taussig, 2004: 145). Several critics have noted this link: Ortega García claims that “la doble moral es quizás el contexto más fuerte que se presenta en *Delirio*”, reflecting Colombian national politics in the 80s and 90s (Ortega García, 2011: 114) while Sánchez-Blake identifies the text's underlying theme as “la imposibilidad de la misma sociedad de ver y de aceptar su realidad porque prefiere continuar el ensueño de sus pequeños mundos artificiales” (Sánchez-Blake, 2007: 325). At the level of the family, the most notable artificial world is that crafted by Eugenia with her denial of incontrovertible proof of her husband's affair but there are several others: Midas, not a family member, but closely connected with the Loudoños, pretends to live in an affluent apartment and develops a rigorous routine to deceive his friends: “le dice a Agustina que gracias a estas prácticas precoces llegó a volverse un mago en el arte de la simulación” [282]. Carlos Vicente, who plays the part of an irreproachable husband and father with strict standards that he seeks to impose on others, has an affair with his sister-in-law, Sofi, and is sexually jealous of his daughter, Agustina. The link between family and nation is reinforced by the medical terminology used by several historians to characterize the national psyche perceived as unhinged by self-delusion. Thus Bushnell points out that the Liberal politician, Gaitán was shot by a “slightly unbalanced” free-lance assassin: “The fact that many Liberals truly thought that the Conservatives had killed their leader, and that many Conservatives honestly believed Colombia was threatened by an international leftist conspiracy, helps explain much of the seemingly irrational, even pathological behaviour that Colombians were to exhibit over the next few years” (Bushnell, 1993: 204).³ The same kind of pretence and hypocrisy displayed by both Midas and Carlos Vicente is evident in the more sinister context of *La Violencia* when the Conservative assassins, known as *Pájaros*, “circulated in black cars without plates and ‘flew back’ to daily life in the towns as devout Catholic butchers, drivers, bartenders, tailors, laundrymen, or police inspectors” (Hylton, 2006: 43).

The family crisis occurs when Carlos Vicente, enraged by what he considers a further expression of his son's effeminate behaviour (his interest in the baby of the maid, Aminta), launches a vicious physical assault on him.⁴ Bichi takes revenge by displaying photographs taken by Carlos Vicente of the nude Sofi. The most remarkable aspect of this episode is that the betrayed Eugenia does not react by turning her ire on her husband as might be expected but, in an astounding show of make-believe which

suppresses incontrovertible evidence to the contrary, attributes the photographs not to her husband but to her elder son, Joaco, who proves a willing colluder in the farce: “Perdón, mamá, no la vuelvo a hacer” [322]. Bichi notes that “el marasmo de la mentira se los tragaba enteros” [323]. In fact, the phantom syndrome is evident here too since Eugenia is taking to extremes her mother Blanca’s denial of reality: when Nicolás dies, she claims he has returned to Germany [310] and she suppresses the very existence of his young pupil, Farax [311]. It is, of course, deception, pretence and lies that unhinge Agustina [48], those multiple lies that undermine the family and which Midas McAllister identifies as the “Catálogo Loudoño de Falsedades Básicas” [265] designed to expunge from the family history the truth about marital infidelity, Agustina’s pregnancy by Midas, her madness, and Aguilar’s membership of the family as Agustina’s husband.

But Agustina is mad, taking to new extremes the mental instability that afflicted her grandfather, Nicolás. She is the most vulnerable of the Loudoños, as Sofi realizes following the family crisis: “esta chiquita es la que va a acabar pagando” [333]. She demonstrates the classic signs of mental imbalance – “de la exaltación a la melancolía a Agustina le basta con dar un paso” [55], thereby replicating the violent mood swings of her grandfather who alternated between being an “energúmeno” and a “melancólico” [222].

Agustina combines premonitory powers and blinkered obsessiveness (for example, with hygiene and order, [17]), making her “clarividente y ciega a la vez” [330]. The fierce protective instincts she shows towards Bichi in the face of their father’s aggressiveness, motivates the secret ceremonies involving the brother and sister at which Agustina officiates, both celebrant and devotee partially undressing to create an atmosphere of sacred eroticism enhanced by incense and the presence of the “holy” objects (the photos of Sofi) removed from their shrine for the solemn occasion [45–46]. This sacred act, performed in secret by brother and sister, provides an explicitly incestuous counterpoint to the profane liaison between Carlos Vicente and Sofi who are related only through marriage. The purpose of the ritual is twofold: to celebrate the power that the photographs confer and to resist the temptation to use this power which (rather like the phallus on the linguistic level) must remain veiled to preserve its symbolic function.⁵

In the rarefied atmosphere of these ceremonies, the photographs that act as profane ciphers of marital infidelity are transmuted into the symbols of the sacred. Initially tokens of lies and deception, they now represent the secret bond between brother and sister whose ceremonies centre on their illicit possession of dangerous evidence. Agustina’s delirium is invariably linked to possession, notably her jealous

surveillance of her part of the house, suggesting territorial possession [207; 228]. She is herself possessed by delirium [38], by her voices or “poderes” [59] and by the spirit of her dead father, as we have seen. The Aguilar/Agustina relationship evokes the national tensions between city and countryside: Aguilar is rational, cultured, professional; Agustina, despite belonging to a higher social class, is associated with the irrational because of her clairvoyant powers and her delirium. The cultured elites turned away from the barbarism of the countryside; Aguilar neglects Agustina’s past. The city itself fell victim to violence; Aguilar is drawn into Agustina’s madness, often wondering whether he himself has become infected by it [88].

Eugenia constructs a pretence of familial normality based on words that have no referents, building up layers of lies: as Sofi remarks, “mentira mata mentira, dime si no es como para volverse loco” [322]. It is such pretence that drives Agustina mad – Midas notes that “cada mentira era para ti un martirio” [263]. As a child she is ignored by her father who bonds with his sons – “sus favoritos son Joaco, para mimarlo, y el Bichi, para atormentarlo” [89]. In this respect, she relives the experience of her mother, Eugenia, who “no está acostumbrada a que su padre le dirija la palabra” [306]. More importantly, she communicates not with her mother but with her mother’s image: “No miro directamente a mi madre, sólo el reflejo de mi madre en el espejo” [113]. Eugenia is linked to the phallus and to the fallacious (which are related as we will see below): she must be veiled in order to function. She draws a veil over sexuality, both its natural expression (when Agustina reaches pubescence and Aminta becomes pregnant) and its transgressive expression (when her husband has an affair with her sister, Sofi).

DELIRIUM IN FAMILY AND NATION: PARALLELS AND DIVERGENCES

André investigates the feminist aspect of the text, focusing on the way Restrepo “hace del delirio o de la insania un efecto sintomático y alegórico de la condición femenina en su interacción con el logos paternal” (André, 2009: 255). But she sees Agustina as a victim and the text as a demonstration of how women themselves perpetuate “su propia sumisión al discurso patriarcal, y con ello, su propia ‘castración’ o ‘decapitación’” (André, 2009: 265). Serna takes a similar view in highlighting Midas’s ironic language as he makes plain to Agustina that her family’s prosperity now derives not from their private resources but rather from the good offices of Pablo Escobar and expresses his contempt for the female cousins of Escobar who had wanted to join his health club by pointing to their physical features that suggest low racial origins. Serna concludes that it is the “elemento femenino al que se le margina,

se le ofende y se le reste voz y espacio dentro del grupo privilegiado al que pertenece el Midas” (Serna, 2007: 45–47).

While it is true that Agustina’s madness derives largely from her dysfunctional family that mirrors a dysfunctional society, it does not follow that Agustina is solely a victim. Midas may be a master ironist but Agustina herself has a sophisticated way with words; and Restrepo’s use of Freudian terms to explain Agustina’s madness –criticized by García Serrano (2007: 316, note 13)– is not without irony. The principles of patriarchy extend from social hierarchies to linguistic structures. The phallus allegedly anchors language, being a positive value standing for clarity and precision while anything not shaped by the phallus is defined as chaotic, fragmented, negative or non-existent (Moi, 1985: 66–67 and Minsky, 1996: 154). Restrepo disrupts the central signifier, thereby undermining the patriarchal order: she transgresses the phallic seriousness of meaning by engaging in what Naomi Schor calls “patriody” that “names a linguistic act of repetition and difference which hovers between parody and parricide”; it highlights women’s playful relationship with the patriarchal theories of psychoanalysis (Schor, 1985: xii). Thus Agustina, who narrates the fraught episode that rendered irrevocable the father-son split, “pontificando como si se le adjudicara mayúsculas a todos los sustantivos” [250], ponders on the link between a casual boyfriend’s “Gran Vela Blanca” and her father’s “Gran Bastón de mando” [213]. Agustina makes light of the male organ and its “textura de cera” [213] –and, by extension, of the Freudian notion of “penis envy” whereby the little girl feels inferior to the boy because of her perceived genital deficiency: Freud believed that “the psychological consequences of penis envy are various and far-reaching. After a woman has become aware of the wound to her narcissism she develops, like a scar, a sense of inferiority”; and he even claimed further that displaced penis envy explains the greater significance of jealousy in the female psyche (Freud and Gay, 1995: 674). Agustina, however, acquires a degree of phallic power as she discovers her father’s weakness, his jealousy of her boyfriends, which she uses to manipulate and taunt him, as we have seen. She converts her father’s earlier indifference, based on the assumption of unchallenged patriarchal control, into an obsessive interest in her sexual behaviour deriving from the painful awareness of his limited power.

In her use of capitalization for these quasi-psychoanalytical terms, Restrepo may be parodying a psychoanalytical procedure described by Rashkin:

Capitalization is the strategic ploy the analysts use to bracket the present, concrete significations of terms such as Drive, Instinct, Castration, Phallus, Pleasure, Anxiety, Shell, Kernel, Mother, Child and to suggest

that these terms be “de-signified”, that is, stripped of their common sense and reinserted within the symbolic operation whose retracing would give voice to their founding silence [...] (Rashkin, 1992: 43).

Restrepo seems to be doing the opposite, her capitalization highlighting the frivolous or clichéd aspect of these terms rather than seeking to refresh them. She is mocking the terminology of psychoanalysis and undermining a male master discourse. She is, in a sense, unveiling the phallus, which is –significantly– linked to the fallacious, as Gallup notes, owing to the “material similarity between the two signifiers. Somehow to try to think the ‘phallus’ is to wind up with fallacy” (Gallup, 1988: 129).

Minsky (1996: 159) points out that the phallus is bogus and that identities based on it are false but, none the less, it structures the world and underpins the symbolic function of language. For Lacan, the acceptance of patriarchal language (and therefore of male power) is the indispensable condition for the sanity of both sexes: without the symbolic there can be no human subjectivity, only psychosis (Derrida, 1979: 161). Derrida makes a related point:

(...) the misfortune of the mad, the interminable misfortune of their silence, is that their best spokesmen are those that betray them best; which is to say that when one attempts to convey their silence *itself*, one has already passed over to the side of the enemy, the side of order, even if one fights against order from within it, putting its origins into question (Derrida, 1991: 36).

From Aguilar’s perspective, Agustina’s prevailing madness is relieved only by momentary interludes of lucidity –“Vámonos a casa, Agustina, le dijo Aguilar pero ya era demasiado tarde [...] ella estaba otra vez anonadada y ya no se fijaba en él, su atención había vuelto a quedar atrapada en esas acacias” [171]. Here Agustina is silent; elsewhere she alternates between obsessive linguistic precision and playful linguistic free-wheeling. Just as her grandmother, Blanca, recoils from words with several meanings –imploing her husband, Nicolás, to use sensible and moderate words and “que abstenga de las demasiadas palabras y de las que tienen mil significados en vez de uno solo” [106]– so Agustina looks to language to impose clarity and control on reality: as Aguilar notes, “es como si estampando nuestro nombre en las cosas [...] pretendiera controlarlas” [52]. Similarly she fears that if the leper –against whom her father locks the doors at night– knows her name, her unique sign of identity, he will gain control over her [134]. For Agustina, language identifies, names, fixes; words that proliferate out of control make her afraid: “En el fondo de mi cabeza vive un pánico que se llama Lepra, que se llama Lazareto, que se llama Agua de

Dios, y que tiene el don de ir cambiando de nombres” [134]. But Agustina is inconsistent: while on the one hand craving a univocal signifier linked to a single signified, she also loves language precisely for its lack of such rigidity; she can, as Midas notes, “agarrar al vuelo dobles sentidos y adivinanzas, mejor dicho lo tuyo es hacer malabares con el lenguaje y jugar caprichosamente con las palabras” [263]. She both upholds the Law of the Father whose meaning is clear and unambiguous and disrupts that law through her playful reconfigurations. Linked to this quality is her inclination to “guiarse no por las señales evidentes y nítidas que le llegan sino por una serie de guiños secretos y manifestaciones encubiertas” [157]. Phallic clarity is metaphorically renounced by Agustina’s obsessions: with the *folds* in the bed sheet [158] –she herself folds and unfolds, folding into madness and then unfolding, often into a kind of *joie de vivre* with theatrical intensity as when she “unfolds” her story of the family crisis (see below); and with her liking for indirect communication, illustrated when she requests at the end that Aguilar signal his continued love for her by wearing a red tie, an image which appears to be significant. As Bowie points out, Lacan and Freud saw words as signifying knots, rich in associations (Bowie, 1987: 144). The tie may suggest Agustina’s continuing father fixation: Aguilar is unlikely to wear ties –“parece vestido por sus enemigos” [32]; Carlos Vicente’s dress, by contrast, is immaculate and formal [88–89]. The colour red points to a recent wound, now resolved or “tied up”: the couple’s estrangement at one stage reached the intensity of “una guerra a dentelladas de la cual vamos saliendo los dos hechos pedazos” [22]. More important is the term’s metafictional aspects and its ambiguities that recall Agustina’s literary predilection for word play.

Hysteria has also been characterized as a pretence or theatre *par excellence*, specifically a male-directed female theatre: the celebrated French physician, Jean-Martin Charcot (1825–1893) labelled the passionate attitudes of his female patients with subtitles such as “appeal”, “amorous supplication”, “eroticism” and “ecstasy” with everything coming down to “the genital thing” (Bronfen, 1998: 185). Agustina identifies similar theatricality in social norms and gender relations, referring, as we have seen, to “La Mano de mi Padre” [134], “La Gran Vela Blanca” and “El Gran Bastón de Mando” [213]. G. S. Rousseau similarly sees hysteria as a social as well as individual phenomenon, as the “barometer responding, through its finely-tuned antennas, to the perpetual stresses of gender and sexuality” (Rousseau, 1993: 106). Discussing the writing of Marguerite Duras, he notes that “hysteria in our century is alive and widespread, though often invisible to the gazer who cannot read its signs [...] The locales of the past have not disappeared but have been transformed

into other social locations [...]” (Rousseau, 1993: 99). Significantly, Rousseau focuses on the modern health club which promotes itself as one of the leading locales of health and therefore of pleasure and happiness. “‘Yet’, says Rousseau, ‘it may be, upon closer observation, that they are merely the places where modern hysteria –what our vocabulary calls stress– has learned to disguise itself as health’” (Rousseau, 1993: 99) –this being a good example of Logan’s dictum that “nervous disorders are everywhere but they are everywhere disguised as something else” (Logan, 1997: 20). Far from being a locale of life enhancement, the health club in *Delirio* transmutes into a torture chamber, the setting for violent death as Dolores falls victim to sadomasochism [190–96].

Agustina’s madness can be seen in many respects as positive, since it places her outside the influence of masculine reason. She defies the well-intentioned, if ill-conceived, efforts of Aguilar to “hacerla entrar en razón”, opting instead for a different kind of enlightenment founded upon her “don de los ojos o visión de lo venidero” [11]. As for Aguilar, he frequently despairs of rescuing Agustina whom he sees as marooned “sobre ese raro territorio que es el delirio” [22], seemingly forgetting his own earlier acknowledgement of “la gama de términos medios que hay entre la cordura y la demencia” [19]. Here Aguilar represents a kind of reason that –as Derrida remarks– “insists upon being sheltered [...] making itself into a barrier against madness” and thereby denying a logos that preceded the split of reason and madness, a logos which within itself permitted dialogue between what were later called reason and madness (unreason), permitted their free circulation and exchange [...]” (Derrida, 1979: 38). But Aguilar is aware of his own fragile psyche, sensing its vulnerability to contagion, as we have seen: “será su locura la que me contagia” [88]. Juliet Mitchell has hailed the hysteric as a creative artist of sorts who “paradoxically rejects what is mere appearance since her negation of so-called normal femininity is aimed at interrogating precisely the discursive formations of gender within which she finds herself” (Mitchell, 1984: 299). Agustina’s psychological trajectory is, by any standards, a spectacular deviation from normal femininity and her rejection of “mere appearance” is key to her character.

The destructiveness of male patriarchal hysteria can be counterpointed to the creative female hysteria represented by Agustina. Silence, typical of the female hysteric, has long been seen as female resistance to patriarchal society and to the patriarchal seriousness of language, being representative of the “creative void at the heart of the will to know” (Braidotti, 1991: 101). Critics such as Trinh. T. Minh-ha have pointed to silence as a will to say or a will to unsay, as a kind of language

that has barely been explored (Castillo, 1992: 40). Castillo refers to Sor Juana's intuition of a "no-decir" that is quite different from "callar" [42]. For his part, Derrida describes madness as "silence, stifled speech", that "plays the irreducible role of that which bears and haunts language [...]. At no point will knowledge alone be able to dominate madness" (Derrida, 1979: 54–55). Elsewhere, in *Cinders*, Derrida explores the metaphorical associations of fire, conflagration, heat; embers, ash, residue. In the cinder, he says, "one can feel the effects of the fire even if the fire itself remains inaccessible, outside cognition though not without leaving a trace" (Derrida, 1991: 2). Agustina's silence suggests her yearning for the now inaccessible origins of language prior to its phallicization, prior to its corruption by dissimulation and pretence. On one occasion, Agustina burns herself, significantly at a place (her tongue) that is associated with language [115].

It is the various deceptions of her mother, Eugenia, that trigger Agustina's delirium but, beyond the family, the delirium of the nation is equally unrelenting –and casts an ironic light on the father-daughter ritual of locking up the house against external danger: "Con todos nosotros resguardados adentro mientras que la calle oscura quedaba afuera, del otro lado, alejada de nosotros como si no existiera ni pudiera hacernos daño con su acechanza" [91].

FAMILY AND NATION: CONFRONTING THE PAST

Agustina's obsession with interpreting hidden signs such as those contained in the folds of the bed sheets [92; 158] are mirrored in the hysterical reconstructions of "nuestra bomba atómica familiar" [244]. When Aguilar asks Sofi when she last saw her sister, Eugenia, his question, "más bien de rutina [...] no sospecha el calibre de la respuesta que va a suscitar" [239]. The narrative of the family crisis is told in three separate but overlapping sections. Sofi is the narrator of the first which covers the background to the incident (with the emphasis on foreboding, predestination and theatrical role-playing by the protagonists) and ends with Carlos Vicente's vicious assault on his son [239–48]. The second narrative, by Agustina, covers the assault, Bichi's display of the photographs and the expectation by father and son that Eugenia will direct her fury at Carlos Vicente (Agustina, the narrator, intervening to say that she knew better, "sólo yo sabía que no sería así", [257]). Finally, Sofi takes up the story again and concludes it by recounting Eugenia's suppression of the incontrovertible truth –that her husband was the photographer. She blames Joaco instead, resorting to blatant make-believe, in which her son

is a willing participant, to preserve the illusion of a stable marriage [318–323]. Here the nervous body tells its story and it is female hysteria that energizes the narrative; as Logan remarks, "the more compelling it [the narrative] is aesthetically or intellectually, the more valuable the nervous condition ultimately appears as a precondition to the act of speech" (Logan, 1997: 3).

This scene is one of Biblical intensity replete with towering rage, uncontrolled violence, unrestrained revenge, paternal wrath reduced to paternal humiliation, and maternal power harnessed to familial preservation. It deserves multiple narrations and varying perspectives. Common to each narrative is Aguilar's participation: far from being a passive listener as might be expected, since he himself played no direct part in the events, he becomes an often irritating participant who interrupts the narrator, sometimes gratuitously.

Notable are Aguilar's seemingly irrelevant questions and comments about secondary matters: he asks Sofi what Agustina did after lunch on the fateful day [243] and Agustina what she and Bichi were viewing on the television just before the critical episode [251]. He is also given to apparent naivety, asking Sofi whether Eugenia actually believed that Joaco had taken the photographs [321]. At other times, far from slowing down the narrative with his superfluous questions, he seeks to curtail digression [246] and urges Sofi to continue with her account [248]. He corrects Agustina about seemingly inconsequential detail (Bichi's clothes and height [252; 255]) that is symptomatic of his desire for certainty. But even the narrators, who were also first-hand witnesses, cannot offer a definitive version of events. Sofi, for example, first suggests that Eugenia was aware of the affair all along and was only concerned to keep it secret. Aguilar intervenes: "¿Está segura de lo que dice, tía Sofi?" [322] but Sofi can offer no such reassurance: "a veces saco la conclusión contraria, que a Eugenia sí la tomaron por sorpresa esas fotos" [322]. Later, as he grows in confidence, Aguilar answers his own question about the consequence of the episode –"la derrota del hijo frente al padre" [323]– but Sofi contradicts him: "el Bichi se guardaba el último as entre la manga, el de su propia libertad" [323].

This story belongs to the women who can only reconstruct it imaginatively despite being directly involved in it –in contrast with the would-be historian, Aguilar, whose attempts to locate the truth in the diaries and letters of Agustina's grandparents, Nicolás and Blanca, are largely unsuccessful: "¿Qué fue de Farax [...]. Tras terminar de leer los diarios y las cartas del armario Aguilar no tiene clara la respuesta [...]" [311].

In some respects Aguilar plays the part of superior observer: he assures Sofi that he understands the sexual neuroses that affect both Eugenia and

Carlos Vicente (“si no entendiera eso no podría descifrar este país”, [245]) but he is, in fact, doubly marginalized, playing no part in the drama itself and largely excluded from its dramatic re-telling: “pero la tía Sofi seguía abundando en explicaciones como si las estuviera dando más bien a sí misma” [245-46]. Unlike Charcot’s male-directed female theatre, this episode is directed by females with the male relegated to a secondary role. Sofi’s self-absorption in her own narrative is surpassed by Agustina whose theatrical delivery Aguilar compares to incantatory religious oratory. His objections on this score are peremptorily dismissed: “déjame Aguilar, déjame seguir con mi misa” [250]—though she later reverts voluntarily to her everyday intonation, her “voz de todos los días” [255].

It is the women, bordering on hysteria, who demonstrate superior understanding to the rational male. Both stand outside their narratives, referring to themselves in the third person, “la tía Sofi servía el chocolate” [245]; “quiero decir con la hija, o sea con Agustina” [256], so suggesting theatrical selves caught up in an hysterical drama that they struggle to reconstruct. Agustina’s delirium is viewed negatively by Aguilar who had looked ruefully at people in the street, people ensconced unthinkingly in the “territorio de la razón” [69] from which Agustina was banished. He refers elsewhere to “la puerta blindada de ese delirio que ni la deja salir ni me permite entrar” [112]. But in her story-telling, Agustina achieves a degree of dramatic intensity that bemuses Aguilar: “cambia de nuevo el tono, vuelve a hablar para sí” [250], echoing here Sofi’s demeanor—“como si se dirigiera a personas que en realidad están ausentes” [250]. Both women view their narratives as creative enterprises that cannot be verified by documentary evidence. Agustina’s delirium can be seen as positive since it removes her from the familial and social furrow (“lira”= “furrow”; “deliro”= “to move out of the furrow, away from the proper path of reason”) (Wiesenthal, 1997: 28).

Roland Barthes makes the point in *La chambre claire* that “L’Histoire est hystérique: elle ne se constitue que si on la regarde—et pour la regarder, il faut en être exclu” (Barthes, 1980: 65). Showalter elaborates on this same point, observing that “hysteria is no longer a question of the wandering womb; it is a question of the wandering story and of whether that story belongs to the hysteric, the doctor, the historian, or the critic” (Showalter, 1993: 335). *Delirio* is Agustina’s story since she has left the furrow, the “lira”, being outside it, “deliro”; the doctor, the historian and the critic all remain in the furrow, strait-jacketed by their will to knowledge, which cannot, as Derrida emphasises, circumscribe madness. She represents what the others seek—in vain—to exclude: the other of knowledge and the origins of language.

The text of *Delirio* is Agustina’s since its structure suggests a language declining—in principle if not in fact—to articulate itself in compliance with the syntax of reason. Agustina, as narrator, introduces the rhythms of madness as she recounts the Father’s confrontation with Bichi, the violence of the father drawing from the son a show of silent rebellion as he replaces the broken TV set:

(...) lo hizo por orgullo, dice Agustina, y cambia de nuevo el tono, vuelve a hablar para sí, pontificando como si le adjudicara mayúsculas a todos los sustantivos, como si se dirigiera a personas que en realidad están ausentes. Fue tu orgullo lo que alzó la máquina [...] se abrió bajo nosotros pues el vacío ¿entiendes Aguilar?” dice Agustina con otra voz, voz de todos los días [250–55].

“Hablas como el Papa, le dice Aguilar” [257], as Agustina deploys what Aguilar had previously identified as her hysteric’s “desaforada cantidad de energía” [198]. This is Agustina’s text also because it often thwarts the desire to know, as when the precise balance of power between the emboldened Agustina and her diminished father cannot be gauged—“¿quién aprovechaba esta agonía, quién se sometía a ella, ¿el padre? ¿la hija?, era un asunto que se mordía la cola y que no se podía acabar de descifrarse” [215]. As Felman states, madness is a kind of rhythm that is unpredictable, unsayable, but is none the less fundamentally narratable as the story of the slippage of a reading between the excessive fullness and the excessive emptiness of meaning (Felman, 1985: 254). This episode also illustrates Small’s contention that literature has a privileged relationship to madness: “a capacity to gesture beyond rationalism and beyond words towards the emotional tenor of an experience otherwise silenced by the language society gives us” (Small, 1996: 19).

This episode is significant because it shows Agustina getting to grips at last with the defining episode of her family history. The novel itself is largely based on Aguilar’s reconstruction of Agustina’s past, as Liriot (2005: 65) points out. The text opens with an extraordinary situation: when Aguilar returns from a few days away visiting his children by his first wife, Marta Elena, he receives a telephone call advising him that Agustina is staying at an hotel. The bemused Aguilar is forced to investigate the circumstances—having previously shown little interest in Agustina’s background: “Aguilar no se preocupaba por preguntarle sobre su pasado [...]” [32] despite Agustina’s plea that he help her write her autobiography [144]. Agustina aspires to be a writer: to counteract her dysfunctional upbringing she needs something to “poner en su justo lugar a su padre y a su madre sacándoles de adentro, donde la atormentaban, para

objetivarlos en unas cuantas hojas de papel” [211]. Sturrock notes that the French writer, Michel Leiris, turned to autobiography as a ‘writing cure’ (Sturrock, 1993: 262) (Agustina’s frequent withdrawal into silence precludes, of course, any possibility of a talking cure). But writing can make up for a lack, in Agustina’s case, of a functional family background. By writing, she will put both parents in their place, her father by exceeding the limits of “legitimate” female activity and her mother by giving expression to what she, Eugenia, repressed. Eugenia’s *don de encubrir* is replaced by Agustina’s aspirational *don de escribir*.

It is only later that Aguilar recognizes the significance of Agustina’s need to write: “necesitaba repasar con alguien los acontecimientos de su vida para encontrarles sentido” [211]. The link with the nation is clear: just as Agustina’s past has remained unassimilated prior to its theatrical narration, so the nation itself is haunted by an unmastered and barbaric past. O’Byrne notes that *La Violencia* refuses to settle as a past; and also refuses to conform to historicisms, to the kind of periodization necessary for elaborating historical narratives (O’Byrne, 2008: 10). In common with the Loudoño family history, the past of the nation is excessive. He refers to the “absence to this day of any organized national attempt to understand the origins and genesis of the conflict [...]” [10] and goes on to note that memory is as much the domain of *fiction* as it is of history [12]. Of most relevance to our analysis of *Delirio* is his reference to Felman and Laub’s notion that “the ‘non-telling’ of a story serves as a perpetuation of its tyranny” [12]. Agustina tells her story –or, rather, stages it, performs it, exposes it to interpretation and reconstruction. As an aesthetic representation of Colombian history, Restrepo’s text contributes to an analogous process at national level.

CONCLUSION

Delirio is largely a text about the past: the past of Agustina, the past of Colombia, and to a lesser extent, a textual past whose themes it reprises: the madness of Rochester’s wife in *Jayne Eyre* for, according to Aguilar, Agustina “parece sacada de las páginas de *Jane Eyre*” [120], a link suggested further by his later reference to Agustina as “siempre perdida entre tu propia cabeza como quien se esconde entre los trastos del ático” [204]. *Delirio* also relates, implicitly, to the work of Restrepo’s Colombian predecessor, José Eustasio Rivera (1888–1928) and to that of the US writer, William Faulkner (1897–1962).⁶ It is significant, perhaps, that one of the answers to Agustina’s crossword is “palimpsest” [88] that can be seen as a metafictional term suggestive of the layers of meaning that underlie Agustina’s behaviour and language. *Delirio* is an

inconsistent text in its depiction of madness which resonates negatively as an allegory of national violence and discord but positively to the extent that it liberates Agustina from the patriarchal structures of artifice. It is ultimately an ambivalent text that engages with the pasts of both Agustina and of Colombia while relinquishing any pretension to singular meaning and conclusion –a typically female response to the violent male megalomania unleashed within the family and nation.

NOTES

1. Sánchez Blake remarks that with *Delirio* Restrepo attains “la cúspide de su carrera literaria” while André claims that the novel “ya forma parte del canon de literatura femenina contemporánea”. See Sánchez-Blake (2007: 325–335) and André (2009: 255–270).
2. Barraza Toledo (2007: 279) claims that Agustina’s madness “se presenta como un pretexto para rastrear los conflictos sociales y la reorganización de la sociedad colombiana durante los años ochenta”. While Agustina’s madness is clearly associated with the dysfunctional society in which she lives –as this essay seeks to emphasize– her delirium is an important theme in itself and has some positive as well as negative aspects as we shall see. In an interview with Sánchez-Blake, Restrepo implies as much by discussing her extensive research on madness that revealed “una lógica absolutamente cerrada, obsesiva, tan hermética que por eso es tan difícil penetrarla”. See note 5 in Sánchez-Blake (2007: 331).
3. Discussing films made by Fernando Vallejo about *La Violencia*, O’Byrne (2008: 53) indicates how they “displace partisan readings of *La Violencia* in order to reveal its dimension as a collective insanity that only widened the gap between rich and poor”.
4. Butler (1993: 14–15) notes that the Law of the Father works to “secure the borders of sex through the threat of psychosis, abjection, psychic unlivability”.
5. Belsey (1994: 62) notes that the phallus can only serve as a signifier when it is veiled. The photographs taken by Carlos Vicente may be seen as phallic: his gaze and control are veiled but implicit in the poses adopted by Sofi.
6. The dramatic narration of the family crisis by Agustina and Sofi has a Faulknerian quality, recalling the imaginative reconstructions of history that dominate *Absalom, Absalom!* (Faulkner, 1936), the story of the South, just as *Delirio* is the story of Colombia, whose recounting seems in some instances, such as the Agustina-Sofi reconstruction, to be as much its subject as the story itself. Here Aguilar’s role is reminiscent of that of Shreve (in *Absalom, Absalom!*) who plays the part of “listener as constant provocateur” (Millgate, 1966: 156–57). The theme of madness at familial level being mirrored by the madness of the nation is reminiscent of Restrepo’s Colombian precursor, José Eustasio Rivera, whose major work, *La vorágine* (Rivera, 1924), has been viewed almost exclusively within the context of the regionalist *novela de la tierra* genre that dominated Latin American literature until 1940. More recently, the work has been reinterpreted with the emphasis on the madness of the protagonist, Arturo Cova, and the implications of his demise on the well-being of the Colombian body politic. Restrepo updates Rivera’s portrait of national madness by placing it against the background of the drug trade and the rise of Pablo Escobar, but she also echoes Rivera’s concern with the degeneration of the Colombian race among the country’s elite through her portrayal of the Loudoño family’s decline, nowhere more starkly evident than in the reference to the photographs of Portulínus –Agustina’s grandfather– at the ages of twenty-nine and thirty-nine: “en el lapso de diez años tomó posesión del músico un ritmo biológico abominable que debía estar hermanado

con la creciente perturbación de su espíritu [...] Antes todo está por ganar y después todo está perdido” [68]. As Rogers notes, madness in *La vorágine* is the source of literary creativity, transforming Cova into a writer with unique insights into the *selva*: “madness becomes the narrative engine of the work and the creative spark for the diary he leaves behind” (Rogers, 2010: 98). Madness is not as closely associated with literary creativity in *Delirio* but there is certainly an echo of the connection in Agustina’s facility with words [263] and, more especially, in her desire to write her autobiography [225].

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