

Laura Restrepo. *Delirio*. Bogotá, Colombia: Alfaguara, 2004.

Colombian author, journalist and political activist Laura Restrepo's latest novel *Delirio* won the prestigious Premio Alfaguara for 2004. José Saramago, the Portuguese Nobel Prize winner who headed the selection committee, praises the novel: "*Delirio* es una expresión de todo lo que Colombia tiene de fascinante, e incluso de terriblemente fascinante. Y cuando el nivel de la escritura llega hasta dónde lo llevó Laura Restrepo, hay que quitarse el sombrero."

This beautifully written novel tells the story of Aguilar's investigation into why his wife, Agustina Lodoño, has gone crazy during the three days that he was out of town on a business trip. This is a polyphonic novel with multiple perspectives and a complex narrative structure in which each of the novel's four narrative threads is masterfully woven together and leads the reader to a suspenseful conclusion. The story is told from four different points of view. There are three first person, stream-of-consciousness-like narrations (Agustina Lodoño, Aguilar, and Midas McAlister) and another narrative perspective based on the diaries and letters of Nicolás Portulinas, Agustina's maternal grandfather, a German musician who immigrated to Colombia.

Agustina, from a family belonging to Bogotá's oligarchy, is an attractive young woman who rejects her family's values and hypocrisy and lives a simple life reading Tarot Cards while receiving a monthly allowance from her parents. She tells the story of her troubled childhood, of her incestuous relationship with her younger brother, and of her father's secret affair with her Aunt Sofia, her mother's sister who lives with the family. Aguilar is Agustina's husband who desperately tries to help his wife come back to "reality" when he discovers she has had a mental breakdown. Aguilar is Marxist literature professor who has been laid off and is currently distributing Purina dog food. He tries to understand why his beloved companion has lost her mind; he delves into her family history and discovers her grandfather's diaries revealing a history of mental illness in her family. Midas McAlister, Agustina's former lover, recalls his relationship with Agustina, her brother, and other members of Bogotá's elite who have become involved with Pablo Escobar's drug trafficking and money laundering. The backdrop for this love story is contemporary Colombian society with its corruption and violence resulting from the conflict between the guerillas, the drug dealers, and the military. One of the great accomplishments of *Delirio* is the complex way in which the personal and the political are interconnected. Agustina's madness is clearly linked to both her family history and to Colombian reality.

Judy Maloof
University of New Mexico