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Memory Private and Public:

Albalucía Angel's Estaba la pájara pinta sentada en el verde limón

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Albalucía Angel's third novel, Estaba la pájara pinta sentada en el verde limón (1975), takes place primarily in the coffee-growing region of Colombia during the period of civil strife known as La Violencia (1947-57). Variously read as a Bildungsroman (Mora) and as a documentary novel (Gerdes), the novel encompasses the childhood and adolescence of Ana, the middle-class protagonist, as well as the history of Colombia into the late 1960s. Ana's personal history is intertwined with and necessarily affects the organization, transmission, and interpretation of the general, public history the novel also seeks to relate. In the child's mind and memory, mixed registers of violence are combined, intercalated, fused: political assassination, imperfectly understood newspaper accounts of rape and dismemberment, a friend's death by streetcar. La pájara pinta blends distinct approaches to the representation of the past into a distinctive novel of memory, one in which memory--and history more broadly--are both recuperated and called into question.

Memory is at once intimate and public; gender identity also has both private and public aspects. Scholars such as Jean Franco have pointed out the instability of previously established boundaries between public and private in Latin America in both the sociopolitical sphere and in literature.[1] In Angel's novel, such boundaries are blurred, but also underscored. La pájara pinta combines the

verifiable or documented with the highly personal, reflecting the priorities of childhood in the protagonist's linking of events. The title of the novel is drawn from a children's round. The title also bears echoes of the pájaros, assassins active during La Violencia. In the title as throughout the novel, childhood and violence, personal and public history, are intertwined. La pájara pinta is an ambitious, difficult novel that attempts to inform the public of a history that has been censored, elided, or denied, and at the same time demands a reader able to disentangle the threads of document, memory, and imagination.

Bella Brodzki's description of feminist revisionary narrative offers an apt characterization of Angel's text: "Most often formulated as subjective responses to cultural crisis or collective trauma and thus testimonially motivated, revisionary narratives are implicit investigations into the relationship between personal experience, collective memory, and history" (22). Writing of novels such as Toni Morrison's Beloved and Cristina Peri Rossi's La nave de los locos, Brodzki notes that such texts "exceed our generic expectations and a single critical function, because they are also performative texts, acts of invocation, recovery, restoration, and reclamation--of space and place denied women's interpretations, women's commemorations. However dissimilar their particular contexts, feminist revisionary narratives seek to redefine the passage from memory to history, to write the intertexts of history, to mediate against the extremes of amnesia and obsession" (32). Angel's novel, with its multitude of voices and dispersal of narrative authority, corresponds to the act of invocation Brodzki describes. In its combination of personal recollections and broadly documented events, La pájara pinta links memory and history. I conceive history in a broad sense to include both individual and collective experience

recorded or recalled. I use memory to refer primarily to personal recollections. However, memory is both personal and collective. As James Fentress and Chris Wickham point out in Social Memory, although memory is subjective, "memory is structured by language, by teaching and observing, by collectively held ideas, and by experiences shared with others. This makes memory social as well. Any attempt to use memory as a historical source in a sensitive way must confront the subjective, yet social, character of memory from the outset" (7). The collective aspect of memory is evident in Ana's imagined dialogue with Sabina, the family maid, to whom Ana explains, "Tienes que perdonar esta manía de reincidir en las historias tristes, pero es que un no sé qué me hace hoy volver el rostro atrás" (232). Memory here is always a shared, communicative act, an act of invocation and reconstruction.

Franco places Angel among a series of Latin American women whose writing "corresponds to this project of displacing the male-centered national allegory and exposes the dubious stereotyping that was always inherent in the epics of nationhood that constitute the Latin American canon" (57). Lucía Guerra-Cunningham maintains that "el aspecto más relevante de Estaba la pájara pinta es el modo en que la Nación colombiana, como signo memorializador, se fragmenta de manera tajante al insertar sectores marginalizados en esa llamada realidad nacional" (13). Angel herself suggests, "I talk about Colombian politics, about the history of my country, but as viewed from the outside" (García Pinto 65). As narrator, Ana is doubly marginal, being both female and young. Moreover, because there is little privileging of one voice over another, what emerges is a collection of voices, rather than a unified account. Guerra-Cunningham argues that it is within the context of a submerged, disordered

history that "'lo doméstico' y 'lo femenino' adquieren un valor contestatario, no sólo con respecto a los parámetros de las construcciones culturales sobre las cuales se construye la Nación sino también como inscripción subversiva del cuerpo de la mujer, de su praxis doméstica y de su vivencia de la Historia" (15). This subversive presence of the female body is evident at many levels, in the repetitive emphasis on the narrator's body as well as in the identification of women with unending domestic work and with the maintenance of home and family. The female body is also the target of violent assaults and of moral and sexual objectification.

The novel's structure is at once fragmentary and circular. Ana's memories of growing up are mediated through specific and reelaborated moments of violence. The imagined dialogue with Sabina frames Ana's memories--she lingers in bed while Sabina cleans the house--and places her recollections and borrowings within the world of the cosseted middle-class girl. The novel's first segment, functioning as a prologue, introduces many of the crucial elements of the narrative--memory, sexuality, birds, torture, the search for meaning in the labyrinth of the past--in a lyrical, free-associative mode. Fear, uncertainty, and a sense of searching are linked with sexuality, as Ana recalls, "te miré los ojos de ese color extraño, brillantes por la fiebre, mientras seguías diciendo cosas y disponiendo de mi miedo como si en realidad lo que tuvieras en la mano fuera otra vez mi sexo descubierto y penetraras en él, como buscando" (9). Fragments of this section are repeated in the novel's final segment. Although it is "her" story, Ana's voice is partially displaced by the inclusion of historical documents, letters, brand names, and film references. The stories of campesinos affected by La Violencia, intercalated quotes from published accounts of April 9, 1948, and

an extended digression on the founding of the city of Pereira are also added to the mix. A preoccupation with language, with what can actually be said, is also evident from the first, as the narrator asks rhetorically, "¿podrá decirse burbuja incandescente?, no creo que se pueda, pero no se me ocurre nada más" (10). The use of historical material and documents both supports and contextualizes Ana's story, giving necessary structure to the confused memories of childhood. The novel's multiple voices are assembled using a variety of techniques, among them documentary borrowing in the form of direct citations, with or without attribution, and repetition, often with variation. Ana's memories are frequently expressed through exhaustively long, all-inclusive sentences, as if to press upon the reader the narrator's own accumulated recollections.

Following the untitled prologue, the novel opens with an account of the events of April 9, 1948. The assassination of Liberal populist Jorge Eliécer Gaitán on that date precipitated rioting in Bogotá and throughout the country.[2] Although the period of La Violencia, in which some 200,000 to 300,000 people died, is often dated from Gaitán's assassination, increasing repression and violence were evident already two years prior in the action, for example, of the "chulavitas," Conservative peasants from the district of Chulavita who were recruited to replace the Liberal police. Gonzalo Sánchez writes that they were "assigned to posts throughout the country, winning a reputation among Liberals as bloodthirsty criminals" (79). Various explanations have been put forth for the causes of the violence, including "partisan politics, economic deprivation, personal vindictiveness, and anticommunism" (Williams 33). David Bushnell notes that La Violencia was primarily rural. The cities were largely spared; moreover, "many of the hardest-hit areas had previously been the scene of

agrarian unrest or were recently settled areas where there was competition for good coffee land and where property titles were often unclear" (206). In a similar vein, Herbert Braun observes that La Violencia was "a struggle with none of the dangers of war, for the leaders stayed within the city and did not place their lives on the line" (35). La Violencia officially concluded with the installation of the National Front in 1958, an arrangement whereby the Liberal and Conservative party elites agreed to alternate in the presidency and divide equally all government posts. The National Front, which formally remained in place until 1974, replaced the populist military government of Gustavo Rojas Pinilla. La Violencia began during the presidency of Conservative Mariano Ospina Pérez; the election of 1950, during which Liberals abstained, brought ultraconservative Laureano Gómez to power. Gómez unleashed terror against the Liberal insurgency, then was deposed by a military coup on June 13, 1953, led by Rojas Pinilla.[3] Violence in Colombia did not cease with the end of La Violencia, and the past thirty years have seen innumerable murders, bombings, and kidnappings. As Lucía Garavito puts it, "A las masacres de campesinos y líderes políticos y sindicales a manos de los diferentes frentes guerrilleros, grupos paramilitares y del ejército (guerra sucia), a los ataques contra indigentes, gamines, homosexuales, prostitutas (la llamada 'limpieza social'), a los conflictos y asesinatos que son producto de los grupos de autodefensa, ha venido a sumarse la violencia originada por la actividad del narcotráfico" (73). Angel's novel, with its polyvocal attempt to both document and understand an earlier period of violence, remains highly relevant today.[4]

In La pájara pinta, news reports of the 9 de abril rioting are filtered through the confusion of a young child, and the summation of her memory includes a

series of events, all granted a similar register of importance: the year 1948 "fue el mismo en que se le cayó el primer diente, mataron a Gaitán, hizo la Comunión y se murió el abuelo de diabetes" (287). This list reflects the accumulative power of memory as well as its process of elaboration. The list establishes the historical context of the novel, and structures the narrative as well. The treatment of two clusters of remembered events, one personal, one public, will serve to illustrate the interchange between different varieties of memory within the novel. On the private side, the deaths of two childhood friends are repeatedly recalled, obsessively intertwined: that of Julieta, who died in childhood (run over by a streetcar) and that of Valeria, who dies at the hands of the police and whose body Ana identifies at the police station. Also significant are Ana's sexual initiation and the events of her own life that coincided with the 9 de abril. The public cluster again includes Gaitán's assassination, as well as the testimony of Teófilo Rojas ("Chispas"), the death of Uriel Gutiérrez, and the dictatorship of Rojas Pinilla, who appears in the novel under the pseudonym Muñoz Sastoque.[5] Throughout the novel, there is a constant back and forth between national and domestic events, between the recorded history available to all, and the ephemeral, individual history available only through private recollection.

The narrator's vigil at the side of her feverish, likely dying lover sets the stage for the recuperation or tracing of memory that will take place in the pages to follow. The free-associative tone contrasts with the exhortations to Colombian youth of the quote from Joaquín Estrada Monsalve that immediately precedes it. Minister of Education at the time Gaitán was killed and author of several books on the period, Estrada Monsalve directs himself to the "Joven colombiano," words that establish an audience for his book, but also for Angel's. The text

cited, El 9 de abril en Palacio, purports to be a diary of the events of April 9, during which time Estrada Monsalve was one of a group of government officials who joined Ospina Pérez and his wife at the presidential palace to wait out events and plan a course of action. Already in this first epigraph the reader's attention is drawn to the fluidity and unreliability of memory. Estrada Monsalve writes of his book, "Lo he escrito sobre notas instantáneas que tuve el cuidado de tomar en las propias pausas de los acontecimientos, para asegurarle a la memoria puntos fijos de reconstrucción" (Angel, n. pag.). These fixed points in turn aid Ana's work of reconstruction, for portions of Estrada Monsalve's text serve as jumping off points for her ruminations. Estrada Monsalve's remarks underscore the "passage from memory to history" to which Brodzki alludes, and prepare the ground for the passage of Ana's own--contrasting--memories into history as well.

The novel takes as a second epigraph a line from Dylan Thomas: "The memories of childhood have no order, and no end." María Mercedes Jaramillo argues that the novel's fragmentary style reflects "el mecanismo mnemotécnico anunciado por la autora en el epígrafe" (212). At the same time, that style, "recrea la falta de información del pueblo colombiano, que sólo recibe retazos de noticias o presencia episodios aislados que no logran formar un corpus coherente que permita entender el proceso social y político que se está viviendo" (212). Similarly, Gabriela Mora suggests that the novel's structure, "constituye una especie de estructura alegórica del caótico período de historia colombiana en que se enmarca" (73). Thus, the disorder of childhood memories simply mirrors the chaos of a disjointed, never entirely understood public history. This fragmentary structure also reflects the exacerbated lack of information of the female

protagonist, who has access only to censored papers, undefined words, and second-hand reports.

The assemblage of events is indeed somewhat chaotic. Helena Araújo argues that "El intento de alternar la memoria personal con la memoria colectiva, falla, así, en la formación de lo que se llaman catálisis, es decir, lazos de unión entre los núcleos del relato" (137). Araújo's objections seem to center on the relative displacement of Ana by the numerous other voices, documents, and narratives included in the novel. However, it is precisely this displacement that produces the novel's most notable effect, a jarring accumulation of memory and distortion that, as a whole, both creates an alternative history of the era represented, and questions the possibility of producing any such history at all. The novel suggests that the present is intelligible only through an all-encompassing recuperation of the past, a project that is nonetheless impossible. The purpose of memory is not purgation, a (re)telling of the history so that all will be revealed and understood. Much remains unexplained, for both narrator and reader, and memory is necessarily faulty, circular, entrapping. The circularity of the novel is, however, somewhat deceptive, for the circle enclosed by the opening and closing segments does not contain all of the action; in particular, the identification of Valeria's body falls outside that frame. The novel does not attempt a logical synthesis. There is no resolution. The final, concluding segment of the novel is the graphic description by the delirious Lorenzo of his earlier torture, a description that does not conclude so much as trail off: "siento que los dedos de las manos son inmensos como unos troncos de árboles que yo soy un balón y que me estoy inflando inflando. . ." (325).

Public and personal memories are linked, in often complex or contradictory ways. Norman R. Brown, Steven K. Shevell, and Lance J. Rips conclude that "the relation between public and personal memories is not a simple one. Availability of personal information depends on the content of the remembered event: People are faster to retrieve, and more likely to use, personal information when dating nonpolitical events than when dating political ones" (157). In La pájara pinta, however, virtually all political events are dated, in part, through their connections to personal information. Fentress and Wickham observe that "Women's life stories give less, or different, space to 'public' history than men's do, for the simple reason that women were less involved in it, or involved in ways that created different sorts of perspectives" (140-41). This different weight might be evident in the persistent linking of personal and public memories throughout Angel's novel. Sheltered, but only partially, from the public events taking place around her, it is the public events that pose the intrusion onto her life story: Gaitán is assassinated the day Ana loses her first tooth. The apparent inversion of public and private information in La pájara pinta reflects the outsider's perspective on events that Angel herself describes. The exclusion of women from public history underscores as well the need to redefine history to include female experience.

An example of the mutual dating of public and private is evident in Ana's recollection of that first lost tooth. Descriptions of her disillusionment when el ratón Pérez failed to leave money under her pillow (her parents being no doubt distracted by the press of external, "important" events) are interspersed with two further narratives: segments in the voice of Doña Bertha, wife of Ospina Pérez, relating their return to the presidential palace on April 9th, and the narrative of

Ana's actions, told in the third person, as she and her friends make their way home from school on that chaotic day (32). The lack of attention to the loss of her first tooth is first connected to her younger brother, only later overshadowed by Gaitán. The brother is also connected to the brand-name litany that colors Ana's conversation with Sabina, and his central role in the family is highlighted: "talco Menen por aquí, Pomada Cero para que no se queme el culito por allá, y ella sola, resola, sin poder confiar ni al gato que esta mañana se le cayó un diente porque nadie va a prestar atención, a quién iba a importarle si hoy al niño precisamente le comenzó a salir la primerita muela" (21).

Again combining entirely personal, idiosyncratic memories and a publicly shared past, the narrative moves directly from an account of childhood Christmas mischief to a less remembered event. Uriel Gutiérrez Restrepo, a student killed by police in 1954, first appears identified only as Uriel, as if the reader will surely recognize him. Here as elsewhere, the contrast between the nagging dialogue with Sabina and the violent episodes recalled is striking. Unwilling to get out of bed, Ana complains to Sabina about the amount of sugar in her Nescafé. She muses, "no sé por qué la gente pierde la memoria. Se olvida. Pasan diez años y es como si no hubiera sido más que un aguacero aquel diluvio que nos dejó el país inundado tanto tiempo. Los estudiantes fueron los primeros que dijeron que por ahí no es la cosa y entonces sin temblarle la mano, un sargentón cualquiera dio la orden, que disparen, y mataron otros diez, cuando el cadáver de Uriel estaba caliente todavía. Cómo es que no se acuerdan, si todavía hay sangre entre los libros y en las calles" (134).[6] Uriel Gutiérrez's death is represented from a number of perspectives, including a narrative of the killings from the point of view of a Sargento Cárdenas, who describes in somewhat

grotesque detail how the stupefied protesters approached the body of their fallen comrade, "empapando a su vez corbatas y pañuelos con la sangre de Uriel" (207). Illustrating the official censorship of press treatment of the events, a page of El Tiempo is also reproduced. In place of a description of the events of June 8 and 9, El Tiempo printed, under the headline "Silencio absoluto," a communiqué prohibiting the publication of any information related to "los hechos de sangre ocurridos en esta ciudad durante los días 8 y 9 de junio" (234).

These instances of publicly recorded repression are complemented by Lorenzo's letters from prison. Lorenzo's first incarceration contrasts with the narrative of extra-legal disappearance and detention that occurs later. A sportswriter initially jailed for passing a bad check, Lorenzo relates the torture of students as described by one of the other prisoners. During a subsequent imprisonment, he describes his own torture in excruciating detail, underscoring the impossibility of communication: "A mí me habían contado cosas pero es un pálido reflejo. Con decirte que un día me tomé los orines de la sed tan vergaja que tenía, y si te cuentan cosas peores, no dudes nunca, esto no es cuento" (277). The novel will close with Lorenzo's voice, with his unfinished, open-ended monologue, as if to underline the importance of attempting to tell what can nonetheless never be fully conveyed.

The novel is in part a call to memory, and there are many events of which people need to be reminded, such as Uriel's death and the "bullring massacre" of 1956.[7] Gerdes argues that the repeated references to such relatively unknown events "otorga a la novela la responsabilidad de reinterpretar la historia verdadera que en otra época le fue negada a la juventud colombiana y al pueblo en general" (24). Yet even as the novel offers both reminders and

reinterpretations of events either forgotten or misunderstood, the diverse bases of historical knowledge--personal memory, public documents, eye-witness accounts--are repeatedly called into question as potentially unreliable.

In keeping with the novel's circular structure, the "birds" of prey that proliferated during La Violencia are inextricable from the birds of the childhood round: "El país se fue llenando de otros pájaros. Abarrotando de asesinos. Cuajándose de muertos" (268). Pájaros appear as terrorists but also in the descriptions of nature and as the painted bird of the children's rhyme. Sánchez writes of the pájaros: "Murderers, called pájaros (birds), could often count on an extensive network of protectors, that is, on the complicity of the authorities and even on access to political figures who later, under the National Front, would occupy positions in Congress, the cabinet, or foreign embassies. [. . .] Pájaros were rewarded according to the importance of their victims, although the people who really got rich from their crimes were the pájaros' urban sponsors" (89). Gerdes notes further that "el pájaro en la época de 'la violencia' no se organiza por afiliación política necesariamente, sino por la violencia misma" (24).[8] One of the novel's documentary sources is the testimony of Teófilo Rojas, a Liberal guerrilla known by the nickname Chispas, who refers to the pájaros within an overall context of violence and persecution, placing himself among "todos los que habíamos tenido que huir a la persecución sectaria de la Policía, del ejército, de los godos, y pájaros, que eran los mismos godos pero más malos, y hasta de los curas" (172). Rojas' testimony is drawn from Guzmán's La violencia en Colombia.[9] A historical personage, Rojas is incorporated into the novel both documentarily, in the transcription of his "testimonio," and as part of the whispers, threats, and gossip that make up Ana and her playmates' nebulous but

frightening awareness of the violence that surrounds them. Newspapers are forbidden: "En esos días comenzaron a salir las fotos en las primeras páginas de todos los periódicos y su mamá les prohibió leer El Tiempo, no más las tiras cómicas" (136). Nevertheless, playing on or near the family coffee farm, the children overhear an old man from Tolima relating the horrors he has seen: "allá acabaron con la familia de los Rojas, sólo quedó el muchacho, Teófilo, y esa noche nos tocó ver una fosa común donde los chulavitas habían apelmazado a diecisiete" (137).[10]

The limits imposed upon girls' knowledge and behavior, and the constraint of language as a vehicle of knowledge, are key points of articulation between the public and private histories depicted in the text, revealing the connections between what is forbidden to children, what is forbidden specifically to girls, and what is forbidden to all. The public censorship that shuts down a newspaper like El Tiempo is but an extension of the domestic censorship that constrains Ana's life. While that private censorship may often be well-intentioned--her parents' attempt to shield her from the horrific images of decapitated peasants that will later produce nightmares--it also contributes to an atmosphere of confusion and dread. A key image retained by Ana is that of the man she sees killed in front of her house in the aftermath of Gaitán's assassination. Although cautioned to remain indoors, Ana is awakened "envuelta en un ruido" (78). Silently opening the window, she sees an officer take aim as the man runs down the street: "Tenía un traje gris, una camisa blanca, una expresión que a ella no se le iba a olvidar. Se apoyó dos segundos en el enchambranado de la ventana, y ella sintió su corazón que se quería salir, o era el de él, que le batía como un ariete, a cincuenta centímetros del suyo" (78). He continues running and is shot dead. Ana's central

recollection of an overarching public event is thus an essentially private, undocumented moment of violence and forbidden knowledge, for she was expressly enjoined not to open the window that night. At school, Ana is punished for whistling and observes that "silbar no es cosa de niñas, nada en la vida es para niñas, definitivamente, cada vez que uno va a hacer algo, ¡no es de niñas!, y ni subirse a un árbol, ni ensuciarse el vestido, ni ponerse bluyines en el pueblo, ni jugar trompo por la calle, como si sólo los varones tuvieran el permiso de hacer y deshacer" (246). The permission to do and undo is what Ana arrogates to herself in the process of representing and reexamining the past.

The concern with language already evident in the prologue--"¿podrá decirse burbuja incandescente?"--runs throughout the narrative of Ana's childhood (10). Ana fills a "libreta de palabras lindas" (37) and she seeks out "palabras rarísimas [. . .] para su colección" (305). A friend whose family are circus performers is exotic for her language as much as for her poverty and occupation: "ni que hablar de las palabras con que embarulla todo. Eso de cabrestante y lo de seducir, digamos. Se las está inventando" (110). When Tina tells stories, the others listen rapt: "no entendían ni jota pero ya se sabía que si preguntaban de a mucho Tina no iba a parar con las palabras raras" (118). While Ana is able to meet her friend's rarified (and unintelligible) vocabulary with doubt--Tina must be making up the words--the strange words that characterize both radio and newspaper reports and her parents' conversations are more disquieting. In listening to the radio broadcasts of el 9 de abril, "No entendía ni la mitad de las palabras que los locutores transmitían" (48). The words not understood draw Ana and her companions unwittingly into a vague understanding of political currents and violent acts beyond their full comprehension. Ana asks her brother,

"¿tú sabes lo qué es emascular?" and adds, "lo leí ayer en el periódico cuando mi mamá se descuidó" (139). When she worries, "¿tú crees que a las niñas también las perjudican?" her brother hushes her: "Tú ni siquieras sabes lo que es perjudicar: mañana buscamos las palabras en el diccionario" (139). The violence that Ana and the other children fear but do not quite understand is characterized by rape and genital mutilation. The focus on the bodies of her two dead friends, on the appearance, preparation, and treatment of those bodies also reflects this sexual violence. In keeping with the novel's emphasis on sexual violence--and the protagonist's uneasy fascination, her wary approach of the threatening, misunderstood words--is Angel's own insistence that "The worst crime during La Violencia was the sexual violence that Colombian women had to suffer, whatever their political ideology or age" (García Pinto 64).

With Valeria Ana identifies her own body, luxuriating in the experiences of skinny dipping and nude sunbathing she shares with Valeria and other friends, yet she must also identify Valeria's body at the police station in a complex process that links the earlier death of Julieta and the voices of authority that interpret both events. Julieta, dead in a streetcar accident, had been held up by the nuns as a cautionary example: "Se la tuvieron que amputar, dijo con cara de que si no se portaban bien tarde o temprano les iba a suceder lo mismo" (65). Julieta's lifeless body is flawless: "No parece una muerta. Lo primero que ve es que tiene las dos piernas, las medias de hilo blancas, los zapatos; el uniforme de gala lo alargaron casi hasta los talones, y así no se le nota, o a lo mejor no es cierto, y lo que les dijo Rudolfina fue nada más por asustarlas" (250). Julieta's body presents a rather contradictory image of, on the one hand, what might happen to her classmates if they step out of line and, on the other, a perfected

icon of childhood innocence, her amputated body newly whole, her appearance one of repose rather than death. By contrast, Valeria's body receives no such care: "¿Reconoce el cadáver?, preguntó el policía, que levantó la sábana mugrosa, dejando al descubierto tu desnudez violada y aterida: tu cuerpo desvalido, que nunca, como esa vez, amé yo tanto" (225). Like Julieta, Valeria is presented as both warning and ideal: the officials' unspoken threats to Ana are as obvious as their handling of the corpse. Valeria has become an object, a corpse rather than herself, yet she must be recognized. The scene also points up the contrast between Ana's attraction to Valeria and the indecent attentions of the police. "¿Lo reconoce? preguntó, escrutando mis reflejos, mientras que colocaba su mano verrugosa encima de tu pecho, así no más, como al descuido. Fue como un garrotazo en pleno vientre. Me manoseaba con los ojos mientras que con sus dedos manchados de nicotina te recorría la piel de arriba abajo [. . .] me constreñía a presenciar su posesión desvergonzada, como si fuera él amo y señor, de mi vida y tu muerte: fue un accidente, dijo. Y comenzó a contar una versión confusa" (252). In a dream-like concatenation of images that combines both funerals, both friends, Ana feels herself floating, "y de repente tropezó con el cuerpo que flotaba desnudo y empezó a acariciarlo, rozándolo muy leve con los labios: Valeria, la llamó en voz muy baja, Valeria. . . y deshizo las trenzas con cuidado. Le cortamos la pierna pero usted tiene que decir que fue accidente, le ordenó el tipo y ella dijo que sí, yo digo lo que quieran, y le pasó la mano por el pezón izquierdo como queriendo revivir algún latido, pero su pecho de paloma siguió inerte, sin dar ni un aleteo" (313). The scene paints in stark relief the distortions of official history and highlights the woman's body--at once denied and manipulated--that underlies many entirely specious public accounts.

Ana's own sexuality is caught up in the confusion of violence and partial recollection. Her first sexual experience is a tantalizing game introduced by one of her rural playmates, Saturia, one that leaves Ana "quieta, sudando, con la corriente que subía despacio por las piernas, y los dedos bajando" (95). Shortly after the girls' initial experimentation, a group of uncomprehending children witness Saturia's rape: "vieron al hombre y a Saturia, o mejor, las piernas de Saturia porque el cuerpo del hombre la cubría y Saturia chillaba ya no más" (98). Later, Ana's first lovemaking with Lorenzo produces a flashback of her rape by Alirio, one of the farm hands, when she was quite young: "el cuerpo de Alirio era el que me montaba haciéndome sentir lo de aquel día en el cañaduzal" (244). The rape is only later fully described, as an incident never entirely understood and about which Ana told no one; she recalls standing up "con gran esfuerzo, porque tenía el cuerpo magullado, y entonces entendió lo que le sucedió a Saturia aquella vez" (259). Ironically, the early sexual play with Saturia, scary but pleasurable, was something Alirio had taught the older girl: Saturia tempts Ana with the promise, "es una cosa que Alirio me enseñó y que es muy rica" (94).

Like the circles of violence and misapprehension that define Ana's experience, memory is repetitive. Returning to the cemetery where her classmate Julieta had been buried years earlier, she protests, "No puede ser que todo se repita. Que el tiempo ande y desande sin variar de camino. Que el cielo y los cipreses y toda esa tristeza pasen de nuevo como si fueran arcaduz de noria, cuál día, cuáles noches, en qué momento fue el regreso" (63). The revolving waterwheel denotes the passage of time without progress or change, an entrapping repetition. The image is suggestive of an ineffable, "simpler" past, a time revealed in the novel as illusory. The image also links water and memory, evoking a process of erosion,

of wearing or watering down. What is recalled and what is shared or communicated do not necessarily coincide. In Ana's mind, the memory of splashing in a metal washtub with Valeria beside the guayabo tree when they were children, "es la visión que más se me repite"; yet "entre nosotras es como si no hubiera ocurrido. Jamás hemos hablado de esas cosas" (18). The image of the tree, so central to the first and last scenes of the novel, is also central to Ana's vision of her friend, of whom she says "Valeria no es como las demás. [. . .] Es su manera de pisar la tierra, de estar en ella, de ser como los árboles, ¿entiendes? Con la raíz clavada muy adentro" (89). Mora notes that the image of the root "se refiere tanto a la búsqueda de identidad que persigue Ana (su raíz), como a la carga que su medio, geografía, familia, ancestro (sus raíces) le han impuesto, y que ella necesita entender para entenderse" (79; original emphasis). Yet Ana has become rootless. Looking into Lorenzo's face, Ana "se da cuenta de que el mirar atrás es vano; de que aquella raíz ya se arrancó de cuajo: que la felicidad y el árbol de guayaba son nada más que un espejismo" (320). In effect, the identity sought has not been found, and the present has not been reconciled to the past.

Guerra-Cunningham argues that Ana ultimately rejects memory (17). Yet while looking back has been perhaps in vain, Ana can no more escape memory than she can produce a single, definitive version of the material recalled. A particularly pessimistic reading of the novel might conclude that memory is an end in itself. That is, memory leads nowhere, has no order and no end--neither purpose nor conclusion. There are other interpretations. Angel's novel indeed offers a more porous and inexact national memory than that of the deterministic nation Guerra-Cunningham describes, expanding in the process the concept of history. But the novel is neither an outright rejection nor a straightforward

redemption of memory. La pájara pinta attempts to address the question of how to represent chaos without reproducing it, how to make chaos intelligible for the reader without so distorting it--smoothing out the rough edges, disentangling the contradictions--that it is no longer chaos that is portrayed. La pájara pinta successfully expands the range of voices included in the retelling of Colombia's recent history and, in so doing, highlights the importance of a history that can encompass the experience of the marginal, that allows women, campesinos, children, and others the chance to speak. Yet the novel's circular structure and its open-ended conclusion also reveal that such a revisionary project is insufficient to alter the conditions of violence and uncertainty that characterize the history at issue. The novel presents an unresolved contradiction between the desire to incorporate diverse individual memories into official history and the recognition that any historical project must remain incomplete.

NOTES

[1] Definitions of both private and public have been highly contested, and these definitions have had real and dangerous consequences. As Franco points out, "The private is, in fact, a slippery term, used by economists to define private enterprise as opposed to the state and by social scientists to refer to the family or the household. But it also refers to the individual and the particular as opposed to the social" (56). Questions of public and private as they relate to the construction, representation, and performance of gender are treated further in my study of Latin American theater, The Leper in Blue.

[2] The events of that day are often referred to as the Bogotazo, especially outside the country. Within Colombia, the term el 9 de abril is more common.

[3] This summary draws on the "Chronology" provided in Bergquist, Peñaranda, and Sánchez, ix-xiv.

[4] The literature on more recent violence in Colombia is considerable. In addition to Bergquist et. al., see Alma Guillermoprieto's The Heart that Bleeds and Tina Rosenberg's Children of Cain.

[5] Of Rojas Pinilla's disguise behind the name Muñoz Sastoque, Dick Gerdes writes: "la omisión del nombre del ex-presidente de Colombia en sí es una

manera de redefinir la realidad por el sencillo hecho de que en medio de tanta objetividad y selección testimonial, todavía la autora no se siente libre para decirlo todo o usar nombres verdaderos. Sin embargo, nos parece que el hecho de haber omitido su nombre sirve para poner en relive (sic) una crítica de la distorsión de la historia" (25). It is important to stress that documentary borrowings are but one element of La pájara pinta, in which the seemingly objective is constantly juxtaposed with the subjective or imagined.

[6] According to James Henderson, "On June 8 [1954] a staff member of the National University called police to the campus to break up a demonstration. Shouting and rock-throwing followed, and police finally fired on a group of students, one of whom, Uriel Gutiérrez, was killed. The following day, thousands of students descended on downtown Bogotá to protest his death by marching on the presidential palace. When they reached the spot of Gaitán's assassination [. . .] they found their way blocked by soldiers of the Colombian Battalion, men only days from being sent to serve in Korea. The police, who normally would have been in charge, were confined to headquarters to avoid further antagonizing the students" (187). Sánchez adds, "during the first urban antigovernment protests in several years, thirteen university demonstrators were shot by the army in events that culminated in the appointment of a colonel as rector of the National University. From that moment the government became defensive before public opinion and sought to neutralize its fiercest adversaries from within the traditional parties, the deposed followers of former Conservative President Gómez" (108).

[7] The massacre took place in February 1956 when "squads of Rojas supporters took offense at the crowd's refusal to join in 'vivas' for the government and retaliated by such means as dragging people feet first down the steps, heads banging on the way. At least eight died" (Bushnell 218).

[8] Another important novel dealing with pájaros is Gustavo Alvarez Gardeazábal's Cóndores no entierran todos los días, whose protagonist, León María Lozano, was one of the most notorious of the assassins.

[9] Angel refers to her use of source material in an interview with Magdalena García Pinto: "I got what photographs I could from the newspapers. There wasn't much historical material, but I could resort to the book La violencia en Colombia [. . .]. This story had to combine certain names, the voices of the guerrillas and the voices of the poor who must speak for themselves. In short, I had to give a voice to each group" (García Pinto, 65).

[10] The central Colombian department of Tolima was especially hard hit by the violence.

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