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Writing at Escape Velocity: An interview with Cristina Rivera Garza

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I caught up with Mexican writer Cristina Rivera Garza in a rare free moment while she was overseeing the second annual Laboratorio Fronterizo de Escritores/Writing Lab on the Border, which she organized between the Centro Cultural de Tijuana and San Diego. The interview took place on July 2nd 2006, the day of the Mexican presidential elections, the results of which are still playing out in a new political environment in Mexico. We spoke in an apartment belonging to Rogelio Arenas, and in the benevolent presence of Sara Poot-Herrera.

Born in Tamaulipas in 1964, Cristina Rivera Garza has lived, studied and taught on both sides of the US-Mexico border. She holds academic degrees in Sociology (UNAM) and Latin American History (UT San Antonio), and is currently a professor of Humanities at the ITESM in Toluca, Mexico (Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey). Her literary production includes two collections of short stories, *La guerra no importa* (1991) and *Ningún reloj cuenta esto* (2002), the novels *Nadie me verá llorar* (1999), *La cresta de Ilión* (2002), and *Lo anterior* (2004), two collections of poetry, *La mas mía* (1998) and *Los textos del yo* (2005), and the forthcoming novel *Las lectoras de Pizarnik* (2007). Her first novel *Nadie me verá llorar* won the 1997 José Rubén Romero National Literary Award for Best Novel in Mexico, the 2000 IMPAC/CONARTE/ITESM National Award for Best Published Novel in Mexico, and the 2001 Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz Latin American Award for Best Book published by a Woman throughout Latin America in the last three years. *Nadie me verá llorar* has been translated into English by Andrew Hurley as *No one will see me cry* and published by Curbstone Press in 2003.

In calling this first novel "one of the most perturbing and beautiful novels ever written in Mexico," Carlos Fuentes was recognizing a powerful new writer whose work draws on historical and literary sources to create a text that offers a new vision of Mexican history, and of the future of literature in the region. The blending of historical documents with fictionalized accounts of lives past takes on a fresh significance in the novel, in which we see a delicate creative gesture that seeks to restore a sense of subjectivity to the clinical accounts of madmen and women, prostitutes and other marginalized subjects that were institutionalized around the time of the Mexican Revolution. Importantly, Rivera Garza's

narrative gestures are always tempered by an awareness of the implied authority of the writer, and in her narrative she constantly undermines the image of the monolithic, controlling author while simultaneously acknowledging the necessity of the creative agent. In this sense, she is part of a new generation of writers that is seeking to carve out an innovative space for narrative in Mexico that both honors the inspiration of the past and offers a fresh vision of creativity in the region.

Rivera Garza writes without fear of genre or gender borders, repeatedly crossing the line between narrative and poetry, collections of short stories and novel, and offering a vision of human subjectivity that challenges the idea of the stability of gender, nation or narrative identity. Her later work, such as *La cresta de Ilión* and *Lo anterior*, offers the reader a glimpse of a transnational geography and literary field that is at once deeply personal and representative of the transformations taking place on both sides of the border. Rivera Garza's first narrative commitment is to the possibilities of language itself, and to the myriad ways in which the human subject flickers in text, in moments of revelation and obscurity. Her desire to constantly renew her own engagement with language and writing has generated a body of work that refuses easy categorizations and presents a constant search for new mediums of expression and exploration. For this reason we can speak of her as 'writing at escape velocity,' as each time she breaks free of the pull of past work and routines of writing to offer up a completely new text which challenges us to reengage with her work and vision. Rivera Garza's fearless explorations evoke the best of the tradition of 20th Century Mexican literature while offering one intriguing potential answer to the persistent questions about the future of literature in the region. For this reason, her new novel is eagerly anticipated with the assurance that it will provide an original adventure in reading and fresh food for thought.

In person Cristina Rivera Garza gives the impression of a boundless, cheerful energy. Her absolute bilingualism was in evidence during our interview, as was her wide-ranging interests in history, narrative and theoretical inquiry into the nature of human language and communication. This interview represents a conversation, with the natural flow of give and take that is often missing in the electronic mail interviews which come out polished, but without the surprises, and the laughter that come from an actual conversation.

Cheyla Samuelson: From our conversation over lunch I gather that you have been extraordinarily active in the last few years. You finished your doctorate and then you were a professor for many years at San Diego State University, you've written several novels and you've been traveling a lot. So I wondered, first of all, how has the change been leaving California and going back to Mexico? And also, how do you continue writing with your schedule?

Cristina Rivera Garza: Well, that's a very good starting point; in many ways I feel like it is, in fact, a starting point. 2004 was the year in which I decided to leave the United Sates after 15 years of living in different states of this country. I had been living in San Diego for seven years before I decided to do something that I had been thinking of doing, something I'd been wanting to do, for a long time. So finally, I made the decision and moved to Central Mexico to a place called Metepec, which is very close to Mexico City,

but it is not Mexico City. I've been teaching at a university down there and I've been, as you said, very, very busy. The first thing about this transition: I used to lead a very stable life with a very clean routine in the United States, and all that changed dramatically when I moved down to Mexico. It's been three years and there has been a lot of interaction with the world in general. And I have been traveling a lot. I have been involved in activities that I had been told in the past that were very much related with the experience of writers in Mexico, but that I had never experienced before: giving talks, presentations, readings, things like that. All in all what I can say is that it's been a good change. I am so very happy that I decided to do it.

CS: On that note, there is always a lot of polemic around the centralization of the literary world in Mexico, but in the past you placed yourself outside that center. In some of your interviews I have seen you say something like, "well, I am sort of on the periphery so I can't say too much about my generation or about certain kinds of contemporary things..." As a writer, what is your relation to Mexico City?

CRG: I would have to start by saying that I believe that there are two different levels in which I relate to Mexico City. On one hand is my very personal relationship with the place. I spent eight years in Mexico City when I went to the UNAM, and I would call those decisive years. I very much love Mexico City, what it represents for me. Mexico City is one of the major characters of *Nadie me verá llorar*, if nothing else. I have this very deep, very personal, very intimate relationship with Mexico City. That doesn't mean that I agree with the centralization of Mexican culture, which I believe is a fact. It's something that has been dominating the dynamics of cultural production in Mexico throughout the 20th century. It was the case in colonial times, and it was the case even in pre-Columbian times. In that sense, I believe it's nothing new. It is a trend about which I am not that optimistic. I might be tempted to say that it is something that is changing, but I am not so sure. What I think has been happening lately, and what makes me happy, is that not all writers have to move to Mexico City in order to become writers. We have cases like David Toscana, and Luis Humberto Crosthwaite. And there are people who continue writing and publishing in important transnational presses, and they are able to do that, something that I believe was not the case for writers living outside of Mexico City in that past. I also believe that lately much of the literature that goes out from Mexico is literature that is not necessarily produced in Central Mexico. I take those two facts as good ones, as a way of questioning a trend that has been the dominant trend in the cultural production in Mexico throughout the 20th Century. My own move to central Mexico has nothing to do with my professional development; not in the sense of my so-called professional development, if you want to call it that, in terms of literature. I wanted to move, I had family there and those were the reasons. I also believe that some of the writers who are from the provinces of Mexico who are now living in Mexico City are also there because of personal reasons rather than the reasons that usually took people from the province to Mexico City. It used to be the case that if you wanted to publish and to have some presence, you had to be there. I don't think that that is the case as forcefully as it used to be, so that is very interesting. I believe we can see that this change is for real when we start to see reviews, articles and essays with critical views of the so-called "Literature of the North" and I believe you can only see that kind of

reading, that kind of interpretation when you are actually dealing with something that is real and that is powerful.

CS: Which brings me to my next question: Here we are in Tijuana and you are directing the Writing Lab on the Border, or the Laboratorio Fronterizo de Escritores. Why is it important that the lab be here in Tijuana?

CRG: I would also have to start by talking about personal issues. When I first began to think about the real possibility of moving down to Mexico City, it was thanks to the activities that I started to get involved with here in Tijuana. I used to be a professor of History at San Diego State University. That was pretty much the definition and the activity. And then in 2001, the CECUT [Centro Cultural de Tijuana] invited me to teach a creative writing class here in Tijuana. And that changed a lot of my personal dynamics, a lot of my relationships with Mexico, and it was very interesting to work again in an environment in which Spanish was the main language, and was in fact the matter of my work again. The many Mexicos that are contained in Tijuana made all that possible for me. In many ways, I am back in Central Mexico because I started to have this working, and personal, and very emotional relationship with this area. And so now that I am down there in Central Mexico, I realize that seeing the whole country from the perspective of this corner—which was my experience—is not as natural and as common as I thought. I believe its is very important for Mexicans, especially those who are in the process of producing books, to be able see the reality of the whole country from a place, from a perspective that is not located, or not only located, in central Mexico. I wanted to be back in Tijuana and I wanted to attract people—to invite people really—to see the nation from this perspective. By to see I mean, to produce. To be able to produce, to be able to create something from this perspective, from this geography, from what it represents to be here. So I started with this plan, the Writing Lab on the Border, and then I began talking with people at several institutions, the Fondo de Cultura Económica, the Centro Cultural de Tijuana, and the University that I am working for these days. All of them were very excited, and contributed financially for a project that ended up, well… I thought it was a very simple idea, but now I realize that I was… [laughing]. It came out as a very complex and a huge project, which is working quite nicely, so far.

CS: How would you describe the growth your narrative writing over that last ten years? Do you have a writing practice that has remained the same, or has it changed?

CRG: Well, looking at the whole process…. Ever since *Nadie me verá llorar* was so welcome in so many environments, the question for me has been how to get out of there. And the question for me in general, I believe, is how to manage to create *líneas de fuga*, or vanishing points, in a way; how to move to a different level of discourse that is not accumulative, but rather different in terms of direction and exploration. I believe that if we would have to find a pattern in my work, it would be that line, a way of escaping from the former book and truly trying to go wherever that exploration might take me. The actual practice of writing is pretty much the same. All my life I've had a full time job, so I am fortunate in a way of course, but that puts limitations on my actual writing. But, I am always doing it no matter what. Reading, the incorporation of readings that come from other fields, from other disciplines, is also very relevant. Whatever might help me to run

away, or to escape from the very thing that I have been creating. I think that's what I am hoping for.

CS: That explains perhaps why all of your books tend to explore a different genre. You know, there are people that are writing historiographic fiction and that's their thing. All of your novels are very, very different....

CRG: Yes, in fact, I was talking to Diana Palaversich a couple days ago and she was saying, "Well, if you read a book by so and so, you know that that's a style and you recognize a voice." And then she said "But If I read *Nadie me verá llorar* and then I read *Lo anterior*, I don't know who the author is." And I take that as a compliment. In fact, this is a reflection that I made after the fact: that escaping from a style is important, escaping from the idea of a voice—escaping from the idea of an authorial, and authoritative voice—is important for me. And so the process is establishing a means, in someway, of establishing a critical distance from the work that comes before, and the work that is coming into being.

CS: I wanted ask about something you once said, and that keeps getting quoted: "Escribir es el proceso de pensar" and now everybody brings it up...

CRG: [Laughing] I remember that...

CS: It's a quote that interviewers have seized upon as exemplifying your poetics of writing. "To write is the physical process of thinking..."

CRG: There are two things that mattered to me back then. The first one is that even though I do believe that if you read a book you might enjoy it and amuse yourself, I am of the opinion that books are way more complex than that. The books that interest me as a reader are books that actually touch my complete being—I like to think of those books as my thinking companions. They help me to interpret the world in which I live, and to interpret it in ways that might be very uncomfortable for me. I like that kind of tension, that kind of uncomfortable interaction that makes me think about my own situation, the situation in which I produce, and what I am producing. So, that was the first thing. Then there is the idea that thinking is central to the process of creation and to the process of recreation, which is reading. But I didn't want this thought to be taken in a solemn, abstract, only intellectual way. Thinking, or that kind of thinking anyway, is something that I believe we do with all our senses. So, the physical process of thinking is a thinking that involves the body—the body as the center of perception, but also the periphery of perception. That's important to me.

CS: Your doctoral thesis deals with the subordination of bodies to the state apparatus of power in Mexico early insane asylums. You've said in interviews that *Nadie me verá llorar* came out of a desire to show something that was absent in the historical documents. There's a part in the book where Matilda keeps thinking about the inability to write the smell of vanilla, which represents certain kind of memory and physicality. What is that missing thing that you wanted to show?

CRG: Well, mostly the process of negotiation. There is one way of seeing the definitions of insanity, or mental illness from that time: from the top down, you know, the evil state—through this wicked psychiatrist—trying to dominate or define, in just one way, the reality of mental illness. And even though that might be the case in certain instances, I was more interested in a perspective that might involve and give agency and

responsibility to all the characters involved. Yes, the physicians, but also the inmates—they were not called patients back then—but also the families of these people who were the first ones in diagnosing and coming to a verdict about the destiny of their loved ones. And so that was what interested me the most at the very beginning, once I got over my very romantic ideas about the mad person, which I had, of course, at the very beginning. You know, this idea that the mad person is…

CS: almost divine,

CRG: …exactly, or a rebel…But then what became way more interesting for me was this very difficult, this very oblique interaction between doctors, family members, the inmate, the authorities, the police. So there were a series of conversations, all of them in very uneven circumstances, of course. It's not a free conversation; we are talking about state institutions with very strict and rigid hierarchies. But at the same time the enigma was that we are in a time in which general doctors are trying to become psychiatrists. They had to listen to the patients that were in process of become mentally ill patients. And so listening to, and accepting in a way, the discourse of *the other* was essential to the process of professionalization of psychiatry. And so that interaction, which, in some fields of History is called negotiation—I don't like the word, it sounds very commercial to me—is in any case indicating this activity, this agency, coming from all the actors involved. I believe that that's something that I very much was interested in. When I wrote the thesis, of course I didn't have space there for descriptions that involved this other sensorial element. But I believe that's what novels are for. Novels are able to do that, at their best moments, regardless of the obsessions of the writer. But, I wouldn't say that that was main element that I saw as missing. What interested me was this other aspect: How can we create a novel based on these historical documents that is not trying to portray the past, that is not trying to take the present day reader to the past, but that is trying to do just the opposite, to make the past contemporary? To use a language that might allow that transition instead of presenting a status quo, an established reality that we might visit as tourists, somehow, through this travel agency that the novel becomes. I didn't want that, and that is the reason why the novel is structured as it is structured and presents the kinds of challenges that it is trying to touch.

CS: Coming back to language, in some of your novels I sense an expression of…not despair perhaps…but of the difficulty or the inability of language to fully express experience or to achieve true communication between individuals, especially in romantic relationships, but also in the clinical relationship. There is this point where language sort of breaks down or fails. What interests me about your work is that often times it seems like you are pushing against those limits, and trying to—if not say things that can't be said—at least to show those spaces that can't be said.

CRG: Well, I think that is the whole point of the novel, is the whole point of writing. Otherwise I feel like I was repeating formulas and just adapting a singular anecdote to structures that had been tried in the past. I'm not that interested in doing that, even though you might sell a lot of books, and your economic situation would be greatly improved. [laughing]. But no, I'm not into that. Lately I tend to believe more and more that I don't write books to communicate, that that's not the point of novels or poetry. It is not their function to pass meaning, or to transmit messages. I tend more towards writing

as a process through which I try to empty language, to leave just what is strictly necessary so that the reader might take what he or she can see there and jump into his own production. So instead of adding to, I see much of what I do as a way of taking away from, becoming more and more austere, if you want to call it that. But I think that is important. There is too much information in our world. And I don't think that the novel needs to fulfill functions that the news already does. I also believe that is it our task as human beings to express ourselves, that we use social and personal narratives to produce ourselves as subjects. So that if writing would be expressing, I mean, I don't see one as necessarily linked to the other. I think we do express ourselves in order to become social, in order to become singular subjects, but that the process of production is a process of production, not a process of expression, in that sense. And so, that would be my starting point: producing using the grammatical tools that are at hand in order to empty the text and just leave the keys, just certain keys, that the reader might press at will, according to his or her experience and whatever he or she wants to create too. I think that would be more closely related to what I think I do. Who knows if I do it? That's a big question.

CS: That's very interesting, because there are so many points in your work when the reader is confronted with two conflicting possibilities about what is going on. At the beginning of *La cresta de Ilión*, the narrator tells the reader that he desires Amparo, and describes the whole thing, and then he says "no, no, no, actually I really feared her." In *Lo anterior* there is a conversation about "is this love or is it nothing?" There are many places in your work where the reader is presented with two scenarios that seem mutually exclusive and there's no resolution. So what you are saying helps explain, perhaps, what is going on there.

CRG: I always think about the Author [gesture of a big A], in a time in which the Death of the Author has died, or after the Death of the Death of the Author. I do believe that I know certain things about what I am doing, but what is really interesting about writing is that mostly I do not know. And this not knowing, this forceful *not knowingness* of the process of writing is what makes it so interesting. So every time I have been asked about, you know, specifics of the novel, specifics of "Is this true?" "Is this really happening?" my answer has been, "well if you want to know my explanation, with the limited knowledge that I have about that, I might say this..." This is a *cliché*, but I believe it is very useful: your answer, your reading is as good as mine. I have become a reader of that book, and it is no longer mine, except in the rights of course, and not even that...

CS: Speaking of the *Death of the Author*, I wanted to ask about philosophy and literary theory, if there is anything that you are reading that is interesting to you and is informing your writing.

CRG: I read a lot of that, I really like it. I don't know, perhaps because I was in graduate school for such a long time...well, I mean, five years, but even before that... That kind of reading informs much of what I do, and much of how I think about what I think I am doing. I remember in the past when I was very young and I first read *El Anti-Edipo* by Deleuze and Guattari, and things like that that were really important. And more recently, now that I have been in this Laboratorio, I thought it was really interesting that I chose writing by Lyn Hejinian, the poet from San Francisco, to share with the people in the lab. Rereading those articles made me realize that I have been reading a lot of that

lately—you know I think that's good, or perhaps I have to change. Much of the literary criticism or theory about writing that I have been reading lately is very much related to what is being produced in the United States—which is a contradiction in terms, thinking in the United States and thinking in Theory is kind of weird—but it's related to the Language Poet Group, and the Post-Language poetry scene and the thought about new narrativity and things like that. And that's perhaps because I lived in California, and I met some of these poets, talked to them and so I have been very much in touch with that kind of reading. I guess that's the reason why I ended up reading David Markson, although I found his book *Wittgenstein's Mistress at the Strand* in New York. It was just one of these things that happen in life. Truly, I was just going through the books, and I had heard someone mentioning Markson in passing. So when I actually saw the book and then read it, I realized immediately what a wonderful piece of work it is. It's totally amazing. I don't think I have read anything as magnificent, ever since I read Markson, which was two or three years ago.

CS: Actually, that was the first one I read, and I immediately gave it to a friend. We have a philosophy reading group, and we have been reading Wittgenstein…

CRG: You have to! Yes, interesting…

CS: Speaking of texts, a lot of times in your work we see the idea of some kind of lost manuscript, that's maybe The Manuscript. In *La cresta de Ilión* Amparo Davila says "my manuscript is lost, this is the key to all my work, and if this could be found then it would all be explained." And also in *La guerra no importa*, there is a manuscript there, that's in a suitcase…

CRG: Is that right…? Wow. Oh my!

CS: I mean, maybe you pick these things out as a reader, and they may or may not mean anything, but it also goes along with this idea of the secret language that keeps popping up in your dedications and in your books. I wondered about this idea of the loss or a sort of fall from a real, transcendent language or a real text. And it gets back to the idea that meaning is not fixed, there is no answer, but there is this kind of desire…

CRG: the longing…

CS: yes….for a real, secret language that's going to allow us as humans to truly communicate…

CRG: I see it in some… yes, in *Nadie me verá llorar* these is also the reading of the documents, and the document as fulfilling that place of the origin, the authentic, and the longing for that, and then the disappointment, or the impossibly…which might be something I actually agree with.

CS: I was also thinking of the short story "Nostalgia," with the idea of this lost place where one truly belongs. The story seems to be somewhat about exile, but also addresses a process of creation that could be literary.

CRG: Yes, this is what I believe: for a while, when all these things were so *en vogue*, when we lost all the master narratives, and all of us that wanted to be cool became pomo thinkers and all that… There was so much emphasis on the loss of originality. "There is no such thing as an authentic thing, blah, blah, blah…" As much as I might see the world through that kind of lens, I also have my doubts. I also think that, especially—and I want to insist on this, after the Death of the Death of the Author—that longing for something

that is unitary, and for something that might explain it all, something that might contain all the codes, is a longing that has been enigmatic to me, and is something that I need to get into. I need to explain why this process that I might feel alienated from intellectually plays such a big part in what I am just as a human being in the 21st Century.

And rather than discarding that option, I am very much interested in going into it. Part of that is going against the grain. The book that I just published with the Fondo de Cultura Económica, *Los textos del yo*, has a lot to do with what I am talking about right now. In a time in which all this distance from the text, this questioning of the I, had become the norm, I am very much interested in that I, that emotional, dirty, very much in there I. I would like to see it again. I might explain it perhaps as just a very old tradition of mine that consists of going against the grain just for the sake of it. Every time I say this, I tell a story about my father. I have to say this in Spanish: "Si alguna vez muriera ahogada, él tendría que buscarme río arriba y no río abajo porque era muy contreras." Me decía: "Siempre estás contradiciendo!" So that might explain why, in a time in which a lot of this pomo lingo has become the norm, I am way more interested in departing from that and trying to look at the actual process, at the actual life lived, the actual experience of being in here. So those are issues that are very real for me.

CS: From my perspective your work shows a more and more explicit engagement with the narrative process, it's an exploration of writing itself, especially *Lo anterior.* It's interesting, because I was thinking that as beginning writers we work so hard to disappear into the text… At first, you might not want to show any traces of yourself, of the agent's struggle in the text, but then later it seems that this subject who writes insists on intruding into the text in other more oblique ways, perhaps through the foregrounding of the writer as character, or through the inclusion of intertextual citations that seem to indicate a dialogue with certain writers and thinkers on the part of a writing subject.

CRG: And that is very conscious too… although, I think it is there even in *Nadie me verá llorar*, which might be a novel less concerned with these issues, or perhaps they are more disguised. But I believe the concern is very much the same. I am writing something that is being writing on its own, and I would like to know how it is being written, how I am participating in the writing of it, and what is my place there. You know the clichés about the novel, or the book, that finally starts to be written on its own—"la escritura que se está escribiendo." I think those are the very happy epiphanic moments of writing. But I am interested in "Why?" "Who is there when this thing is happening?" "What am I doing there when this is happening?" And since that is very interesting to me, it is my bet that it would also be interesting for the person who is reading it, as less a character who is just looking at the process, and more a character that is involved in the process and that has something to do, and something to say about what is going on there. So we see all these issues about the engagement of the reader, of the reader as the author, or the real author, of the novel, and the reader who is writing his or her own novel. I do believe in that, even though they are *clichés*. I think it is very interesting when you actually go through your own specific process, through your own very private "this is another writing on its own" kind of thing.

CS: Right! There is a part in *Lo anterior* when the discussion of the third person narrator comes up. *La cresta de Ilión* is written in the first person, and then *Lo anterior* is

so interesting because there is a narrative voice that is in the third person, but you can still feel the shifts of perceptive between different characters in it. And you know that you are sort of seeing through one person's eyes or another's, all in the third person. One of the characters says: "Is there a male or a female behind the third person?" and the answer is very oblique...

CRG: Yes, you never know... In *Nadie me verá llorar* one of the issues about reading those documents was that my first temptation, in fact, was to serve as a ventriloquist in a way, and to give voice to whatever was happening. And in some of the manuscripts that I have of this novel, a lot of it has been written in the first person—in different first persons. And through the writing of the novel I became very aware of kind of an imperial twist that I was falling prey to, and then I started to think "Why? What right do I have? I don't know it. I mean, why? Why am I doing that?" So a lot of the third persons in this novel are in fact the first person in disguise. And there are—this from the limited knowledge of the author, of course—points in which this is being decided by the characters themselves. There is a point in which Joaquín Buitrago says "él." And then there are these two separations between the paragraphs, and then this "él" begins to speak, but this "él" is this "I" that cannot even do, or doesn't want, that kind of intimacy, that effect of intimacy that the use of the I usually produces. And so this third person that might allow more contact than that fake first person that I was trying to create. What I am trying to say is that it's been an obsession; I mean it's something that I really get very concerned about because I think of the novel as an aesthetic quest, but also as a political artifact in its own right. So the matter of the voice, or the voices, is not only something that might function or might not function within the text—but the text is part of a context in which every single decision, specifically about voice or more generally about a style, is related politically to power relations in the world in which the novel is going to be read.

CS: I was thinking about Italo Calvino's *The uses of literature*, and I wondered, what are the uses of literature in Mexico in the 21st Century? You have commented before that a nationalist narrative, or the creation of national identity is not so prevalent anymore. What are writers able to do now?

CRG: I don't know if that was the concern of people who were actually writing then; that was the concern of people who were reading from official positions either in the government or in the university. I believe that the creation of the national canon, or the participation in this canon, might not be what is the most import concern of the actual writers. Although, I can't see a writer who is not concerned about that in some way or another, [laughing] but well, that's just me. So, what I am trying to say is that the production of the early 20th century, which is usually linked to the production of a national identity, is just a reading—one official reading—of a very diverse body of works. And I believe that even the most superficial search into the variety of authors that were working at that time might tell us that no, not everyone everybody was concerned with this national identity and they might have been writing about many other issues that, somehow, in different readings, ended up being connected to those kinds of things.

CS: From the perspective of the idea of *el escritor comprometido*, now there is not so much of sense that there is a political charge to peoples' writing, or not necessarily, although as you say all writing is political in some sense...

CRG: Yes, but not in the sense of the…

CS: *La izquierda*, etc….

CRG: I see what you mean. No, when I say that all writing is political writing I am trying to avoid the stereotypes of the 20th century—especially the ones about Latin American writers who were so prone to produce opinions about everything, and especially about issues concerning the social sphere. I do believe that that is not the case anymore, not in that sense. I can speak of my personal experience. Even though I might not think of that pattern, or that profile, as something I would like to do, I do believe that the book is a cultural product, and as such it has connections, inevitable connections, with power relations. I might not be a speaker for a specific cause or for a specific issue of national interest, but whoever gets in touch with ways of perceiving the world—which is what I believe novels also do—is someone who is dealing with politics, in that very general sense. So I think this has been done in all the books created in all the world, throughout the ages. This is something that gets done whether you want it or not. What I see here in the transition at the beginning of the 21st Century is a forceful way of saying "No. We don't want to do that." I mean the typical, stereotypical role of the Latin American intellectual who has to say the truth about everything…

CS: Well, one final question: You are working on a new novel. Can you tell us a little bit about it?

CRG: I believe it's a novel in which all the previous explorations will converge in a way. I've had a lot of fun writing it, which I hope helps, but I am not so sure. It's called *Las lectoras de Pizarnik* and in many ways it has to do with my ideas of what reading is, and the ideas about the author and about writing that I have been talking with you about. In this case it gets to be played out in the context of a genre that I like very much, which is the Thriller, or more specifically, the Detective Story. I have a female detective doing a lot of explorations, and so we'll see how it happens. Because I didn't want it to be the kind of detective story that ends up with a conclusion, with a resolution, with a clarification. I want to take the Thriller and do something else with it, so we'll see what happens….

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