

Antinovela negra: Cristina Rivera Garza's *La muerte me da* and the Critical Contemplation of Violence in Contemporary Mexico.

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

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Cristina Rivera Garza's *La muerte me da* and the Critical Contemplation of Violence in Contemporary Mexico

A recent boom in criminal violence has transformed social life in many parts of Latin America. According to homicide statistics published by the United Nations in 2012, eight of the world's ten most violent countries are located in Latin America or the Caribbean ("Burn-out"). In the United States, the history of the recent spike in violence in Mexico is well known: during the six-year term of President Felipe Calderón (2006–2012), a policy of direct military confrontation of organized crime resulted in some 70,000 confirmed killings and more than 27,000 disappearances in the so-called *guerra contra el narcotráfico* (Quesada). The terrifying intensity and spectacular nature of the criminal violence, including such tactics as broadcasting videos of torture and executions and public dumping and display of hung, mutilated and beheaded cadavers, has given rise to urgent national debates over ethical and political norms for media representations of such hyperviolence. Considerable attention has been focused on ferocious intimidation of journalists by criminal organizations and on government efforts to regulate journalistic and artistic discourses on *el narco*. A famous case in point is that of the popular drug-trafficking ballads known as *narcocorridos*, which have provoked numerous calls for [End Page 391] censorship.¹ The most visible literary product associated with this new criminality is the *narconovela*, whose protagonists are often professional criminals fighting for survival, power and profit. The *narconovela* can be classified as a variant of the *novela negra*, or hard-boiled crime novel, and the best known *narconovelas* show far more interest in criminal customs, masculine heroics and violent adventure than in narrative innovation or the social(ist) consciousness-raising associated with the previous *novela negra* variant known as the *neopolicia*.

The *novela negra* is commonly considered one of the primary narrative forms of the Spanish American Post-Boom, and interest in it has grown in approximate correlation with social concern over crime in much of Latin America. However, throughout the rise of the Latin American *novela*

negra over the last forty years, very few women writers have contributed prominently to the development of this heavily masculinist genre. In this context, Cristina Rivera Garza's *La muerte me da* is a remarkable publication. Since Rivera Garza dates the text in 2003, we know that its composition precedes the violent escalation under President Calderón, and that the violent events narrated do not correspond directly with those of the *guerra contra el narco*. However, *La muerte me da* does coincide with the escalation in its reception, since it was published in 2007 and received the Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz Prize in 2009. The novel has attained a broad relevance during these years, since it contains profoundly serious and literarily incisive reflections on the psychological and epistemological impact of violence and on the ethical complications of its representation, themes that have demanded urgent attention in the decade since its completion.

As Rivera Garza has acknowledged in her most recent book of essays, to write (or read) in contemporary Mexico is to never forget the immanence of lethal violence.

¿Qué significa escribir hoy en ese contexto? ¿Qué tipo de retos enfrenta el ejercicio de la escritura en un medio donde la precariedad del trabajo y la muerte horrisona constituyen la materia de todos los días? ¿Cuáles son los diálogos estéticos y éticos a los que nos avienta el hecho de escribir, literalmente, rodeados de muertos?

(*Los muertos indóciles* 19)

In contrast to the *narconovelistas*, who have been denounced for their morbid delight in violent spectacle, as well as for their complacent narrative conventionalism and their coarse *costumbrismo* (“su realismo [End Page 392] abrumadoramente inconsciente,” in the words of Rafael Lemus, 39), Rivera Garza has engaged repeatedly in sensitive and erudite reflection on the ethical dilemmas involved in narrating Mexico's experience of extreme violence. In a 2007 conference presentation, she acknowledged her struggle to evade complicity with violent acts in the

process of narrating them, and stated her conviction that literature should transcend contextual...

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