

## "La patria es impecable y diamantina": Performing *Diamantina* in Cristina Rivera Garza's (Non)Fiction

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**ABSTRACT:** Cristina Rivera Garza's (non) fiction trajectory is a dialogue of interests threaded by her passions for translation, history, poetics, among many other topics. In this article, *Diamantina*—a repetitive character in the author's corpora—is traced to analyze how gender and cultural memory are portrayed in *Nadie me verá llorar* (1999) *Ningún reloj cuenta esto* (2002) and *Dolerse: textos desde un país herido* (2011). By commenting on Ramón López Velarde's famous stanza "La patria es impecable y diamantina" in "Suave patria" (1921), Rivera Garza proposes an alternative way of performing nation by women who resist the virtuous adjectives exalted by Velarde in post-revolutionary Mexico, which can be threaded to the glitter used in recent public demonstrations against femicides and gender-based violence. *Narrative memory* is proposed to name the intersections of intertextuality and cultural memory in her literary cultural production that goes beyond the borders of a nation. This article centralizes the short-story, "La alineación también tiene su belleza" in *Ningún reloj cuenta esto*, which is set in San Antonio, Texas and New York City, to analyze Mexican canonical representations of women as Patria from a transnational lens.

**KEYWORDS:** Latin American literature, Mexican literature, canon, narrative memory, intertextuality, translation, nation, glitter revolution.

Cristina Rivera Garza is an award-winning Mexican writer, historian, translator, a Distinguished Professor in Hispanic Studies<sup>1</sup>, and a 2020 distinguished McArthur Fellow. As an author and scholar, she is well-known for her historical academic work on 20<sup>th</sup> Century mental hospitals in Mexico City, her extensive literary trajectory, and for her commentaries on Mexico/United States border politics published on social media platforms, academic journals, and international newspapers. Rivera Garza's 2002 compilation of short stories *Ningún reloj cuenta esto* (*No clock tells this*<sup>2</sup>) in particular offers narratives that are particularly noted for their exploration of the cultural and literary meanings of borders, migration, translation, and writing that *tells us*, as the title of the collection makes clear, stories that are not normally *told*. This article centralizes one of its stories, "La alineación también tiene su belleza"<sup>3</sup>, *Diamantina*—a repetitive character in the author's fiction—along Rivera Garza's nonfiction, to analyze how these represent patria/nation, within the literary and political contexts of Mexico from a transnational lens.

To explore these praxes, *narrative memory* is proposed to critically name the intersections of intertextuality and cultural memory in Rivera Garza's literary cultural production. The term guides the analysis on the gendered and patriotic Mexican literary tradition from the 20<sup>th</sup> century confronted by the author from the coordinates of New York City. The convergence of these topics will be expounded first through the characteristics of the short story's protagonist, a translator who identifies herself as a Mexican

immigrant. This will be followed by an analysis of how *Diamantina* challenges the representation of "nation" in "Suave Patria" – a poem published in 1921 by the Mexican poet Ramón López Velarde – across fiction, poetry, and essayistic texts by Rivera Garza– from her first published novel, *Nadie me verá llorar* (1999) to *Dolerse: textos desde un país herido* (2011) – a multi-genre compilation.

"Suave Patria" marks the centennial celebration of Mexico's independence from Spain and it was published by the prestigious cultural literary magazine *El maestro* directed by José Vasconcelos – Dean of the National University of Mexico at the time. In 1921, López Velarde was already well-known writer in the most important political and literary circles of Mexico City (Mendiola 70). Once published, "Suave patria" was hailed as a poem that moved away from the imagery of Mexico City and invited the reader to Mexico's provinces and its stanzas have been deemed by critics as intimate, celebratory, and a portrait of everyday life in Mexico's provinces (Granados 38). Throughout this poem, Velarde rejects the grandiloquence of past national epic discourses, as the poetic voice declares with the use of "sordina", "muted", in its first stanzas: "Diré con una épica sordina: la Patria es impecable y diamantina" (304). "Diamantina" can be translated into English as "diamantine", "glittering", and Velarde's consecutive stanzas are imbued with nationalism; "patria" is the homeland, a woman, the "motherland":

Inaccesible al deshonor, floreces;

creeré en ti, mientras una mexicana  
en su tápalo lleve los dobles  
de la tienda, a las seis de la mañana,  
y al estrenar su lujo, quede lleno  
el país, del aroma del estreno (304)

The commemorative tone of "newness" is melodically embodied and scented by the Mexican woman wearing a "tápalo" (a shawl) carrying home fresh dough. The clamor these poetic scenes received by major literary and political figures at the time of publication and decades after, led to Velarde being labeled "national poet" by Mexican president Luis Echeverría in 1971 (1970-1976) (Waldron 59). Velarde's poem built an imaginary of the nation that has been lauded, critique, re-appropriated, and confronted through generations as Carlos Monsiváis exemplifies: "Ya para 1922-1923, 'La suave patria' era un poema que circulaba profusamente como parte del canon de la mexicanidad, cosa que hasta ahora se repite y que todavía seguimos explotando y explorando sin término" (Monsiváis 1996); for example, Jose Emilio Pacheco's "Alta traición" (1969) – which is also dedicated to the Mexican nation – has been argued to be a continuation of patriotic poetic tradition initiated by Lopez Velarde (Higashi 91). Octavio Paz, Mexico's 1990 Nobel Prize winner in literature, wrote one of the most famous essays about his poetry in 1965, "El camino de la pasión – Ramón López Velarde" in *Cuadrivio*, in which he celebrates this poem and praises it for its musicality and difficult aesthetic: "Nadie sino López Velarde podría haber escrito esas líneas [...] López Velarde es un poeta difícil y proclama una estética difícil" (90). Rivera Garza's positionality has been to reimagine the poem's adjectives, tones, and images in multiple instances; to undertake a critique of a "patria" that has been deemed a "virtuous woman" and to question if Mexico's history is still worthy of celebration and "diamantina". Her contemporary reading and interpretation of this poem also unfolds transnational representations of "patria" beyond its geopolitical borders as it will be argued in the analysis of "La alienación también tiene su belleza" and *Dolerse: textos desde un país herido* [Dolerse].

*Ningún reloj cuenta esto* offers a textual form at the borders of genre: poetry, novel, essay, and historical research. This is Rivera Garza's second collection of narratives that are particularly noted for their exploration of the cultural and literary meaning of borders and migration, which is a critical point for "La alienación también tiene su belleza". At the beginning of this twenty-two page short story, the nameless protagonist describes a job interview conducted in San Antonio Texas by Diamantina Skvorc, the owner of "Diamantina Beauty Products Inc." Diamantina, a Texas native married to an American of Croatian heritage, inherited nine letters from her grandmother and is looking for a person to translate the them from Spanish to English. Diamantina needs both a translator and a cultural intermediary, as we can infer from the following avowal: "Yo no las entiendo, la letra es muy irregular y habla de cosas que no conozco. México. La familia. Secretos" (Rivera Garza 2002,

47) This quote alludes to the double task of the translator, who must be fluent in both Spanish, and the history and culture of Mexico itself. The task of the cultural translation seems unproblematic to Diamantina, especially after the protagonist tells her about her studies in Mexico, her repertoire of Spanish practical jokes, and mastery of the romantic tongue twister: "[...] para qué quiero que me quiera el que no quiero que me quiera si el que quiero que me quiera no me quiere como yo quiero que me quiera" (Rivera Garza 2002, 44). The narrator demonstrates her linguistic and cultural proficiency with respect to Mexico, and consequently Diamantina hires her. Yet from the moment of the first exchange between the translator and the businesswoman, one can distinguish cultural tensions arising from the apposition of Mexican and U.S cultural paradigms, and from the positions of English and Spanish as languages spoken in the United States. The translator places the spotlight on these tensions by showing herself to be critical of Diamantina for being a woman of Mexican origin, born in Texas, who speaks no Spanish.

This critique is extended through the text's representation of the job interview, which emphasizes economic and cultural divides. The business owner, in contrast to the translator, is an embodiment of excess, carelessness, and economic privilege:

Estábamos a orillas del río, viendo pasar a través de los cristales el lento trotar de los turistas y los reflejos del sol sobre el lomo imperceptible del agua. Aún si no conseguía el trabajo, esta comida me resarcía de dos meses de hambruna vegetariana, y otros más de paseos nómadas y solitarios sobre la pasarela del río sin más de dos centavos en las bolsas (Rivera Garza 2002, 44).

At the same time, during the interview, the internal monologue of the narrator reveals that Diamantina is not a unique case: "Diamantina tenía el mismo rostro moreno y todas las buenas maneras de las damas enriquecidas que me habían mantenido con becas y préstamos escolares hasta el buen día en que recibí mi título y me encontré sin trabajo" (Rivera Garza 2002, 44) The affluent women of Latina/Latin American origin with whom the narrator is familiar hide their heritage, like the owner who hides it under the luster of her name and makeup. In recognizing intersecting practices of concealment, the story also emphasizes that these practices boast strategic merits in the U.S. environment, as Diamantina confirms: "La costumbre, ya sabes, querida, y esto de andar en negocios donde los López Ramírez no suenan ni tantito como los Jameson o Smith [...]" (Rivera Garza 2002, 45). Like her prosperous cosmetics company, which one of its characteristics is to redefine faces, for Diamantina the covering up – "passing" and/or whitewashing" – of her "Latin" surname is a savvy business strategy.

While this strategy of "passing" rewards Diamantina well in the business environment, it fails her when she tries to understand her family's past. It is relevant to point out at this moment that the

Spanish name *Diamantina* derives from an adjective that describes objects that sparkle or shine like diamonds, without necessarily being diamonds. In addition to the sense of dazzling appearance this name encodes, in the story it also stands for a cultural and familial legacy, because it is a name the owner shares with the grandmother whose letters she wishes to have translated. But, the legacy of the name is not only part of the narrative economy of the short story, but also of Rivera Garza bibliography and Mexico's literary history.

When she accepts the translation commission, the protagonist also consents to move to New York for nine weeks, where *Diamantina* is doing business. During their first night in the city, *Diamantina* gives the narrator the pack of letters to translate. The letters recount the unraveling of the grandmother's clandestine romance in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The translator did not expect the tenderness and melancholic tone of the letters to make such a strong impression on her and their descriptions intensifies their effect on her:

Eran cortas y tristes, de esas cosas que se escriben con el alma en un hilo, a escondidas de uno mismo, bajo la luz de una vela. Tan íntimas que daba pena verlas. [...] Leyéndolas una tras otra a toda prisa llegué a pensar que, tal vez, Pessoa había estado equivocado: las cartas de amor no eran ridículas (Rivera Garza 2002, 50).

While they reveal family secrets, the letters also create a pathway to discourses of another era. Through the motifs of the epistolary form and the practice of translation, Rivera Garza also stages a different kind of "passing", a crossing between different contexts and genres to echo a *narrative memory*.

During the second day of her stay in New York, the translator is invited to attend a cultural festival for the former Yugoslavia. For *Diamantina*, the festival represents merely a commercial space in which to promote her cosmetic products and exercise her influence. The translator wryly remarks that *Diamantina* is not alone in recognizing the social and economic capital she holds: "Tanto demócratas como republicanos la llamaban de cuando en cuando para que endosara las candidaturas de unos o de otros y ella, pensando en la propaganda para su negocio, lo hacía dependiendo de los riesgos y las ganancias" (Rivera Garza 2002, 49). It is for this reason that, much like her cosmetics, *Diamantina* uses the translator to attract praise and promote herself; during the event, she introduces the protagonist as her niece, and announces that "Su español es perfecto –decía como nota introductoria a quien la quisiera escuchar" (Rivera Garza 2002, 53).

The festival reflects the exploitation of cultural spaces for economic gain. The translator rejects the exploitative dynamics of this space and retreats to the hotel's bar, where she meets *Diamantina*'s son, José María Skvorc and Federico Hoffman. After watching José María seduce a woman in the bar, Hoffman exclaims: "Todo es resultado de esta maldita alienación – continuó

-, se conocen aquí, se desconocen allá. Todo empieza, todo acaba y nada pasa en realidad" (Rivera Garza 2002, 55) While listening to Hoffman, the protagonist is affected by the sudden eruption of the grandmother's words into her consciousness, starting with the command "–Escúchalo bien, querida –me susurró la mujer marchita desde su lejano aposento" (Rivera Garza 2002, 55). The voice of the elder *Diamantina* does not surprise her; on the contrary, it persuades her to converse with Hoffman and she spends the night wandering in the streets of New York with the man who spurns alienation. From this moment onwards in the story, the grandmother's letters exert a guiding force on the actions of the translator and transform her use of language.

On her second date, the narrator cannot find the words to spark Hoffman's interest. She describes him as a man who belongs to another era. The translator understands this inability as the effect of a distance or gap she characterizes as *temporal*. To breach this verbal barrier, she turns to the grandmother's language:

Fue tan fácil, tan sencillo, querida *Diamantina*; de la misma manera que me enamoré de tus cartas, así caí dentro del amor de Federico Hoffman [...] Y, *Diamantina*, lo siento, pero para acercarme yo no tenía más que tus palabras, no te tenía más que a ti [...] *mi amor, carne mi carne*, los copos de nieve cayendo sobre su abrigo, *sangre de mi sangre*, deshaciéndose sobre sus mejillas blancas, *amor mío*, entretejiéndose con los besos y los abrazos y las ganas de que esto nunca acabará (Rivera Garza 2002, 59).

The phrases in italics, which are those of the elder *Diamantina*, emphasize a relevance of romantic discourse in this text, which the translator does not feel able to produce herself. The usage of this type language calls to mind terms identified by Roland Barthes in *Lover's Discourse – Fragments* (1978). Barthes' relevant work provides discussions on "love", but also on other intersecting terms ("anguish", "absence", "declaration", among others), which echo the sentiments italicized in Rivera Garza's passage above. Barthes comments on the dialogical qualities of the "letter" stating: "[t]his figure refers to the special dialectic of the love letter, both blank (encoded) and expressive (charged with longing to signify desire)" (157). I am interested in the system of codification the philosopher proposes, since this system can be recognized in the narrative logic of Rivera Garza's story: the plot centers around the need for a translator-narrator who can decode letters of desire from one *Diamantina* and deliver them to another. The expressive power and performative effect of romantic discourse is what induces the translator to make the grandmother's words her own by performing them. The everyday life of the protagonist is gradually reconfigured by her performance of the "old" *Diamantina*. Despite the differences between 20<sup>th</sup> century Mexico and 21<sup>st</sup> century New York, the narrator's present requires her to echo a specific memory, that of a Mexican woman.

This performative praxis evokes cultural components of a distant past to dialogue with the narrative's present, and as a result, produces an innovative way of converging multiple literary worlds. At the same time, by using the name *Diamantina*, Rivera Garza points to her novel *Nadie me verá llorar* (1999), which lead us to explore the literary ramifications of the name in the context of this novel that centers post-revolutionary Mexico. My use of *narrative memory* aims then to critically approach how the author simultaneously invokes past discourses and literary traditions in her text while at the same time providing a critique on gendered discourses. My approach of the function of "memory" it is through Bakhtin's propositions on dialogism and intertextuality within different literary genres. In his essay "Discourse of the novel" (1981), Bakhtin extensively delves into the trajectory of this genre and its mnemonic components. His focus on the development of the novel extends to other concepts analyzed in *The Dialogic Imagination* (1981). His propositions on genre and memory also consider how re-interpretations of a text's "images and language" are re-contextualized as cultures change over time (Bakhtin 1981, 420-421); in the final section of his essay, Bakhtin uses the term "re-accentuation" to discuss these changes, he claims:

Every age re-accentuates in its own way the works of its most immediate past [...] Thanks to the intentional potential embedded in them, such works have proved capable of uncovering in each era and against ever new dialogizing backgrounds ever newer aspects of meaning (Bakhtin 1981, 421).

*Narrative memory* echoes these propositions to analyze how Rivera Garza re-accentuates the characters named *Diamantina* in her own fictional trajectory. The experience of shifts between different time periods, spaces, and representational systems in "La alienación también tiene su belleza" pulls it into a direction of a critique of the literature been re-accentuated. The dialogue with the past in "La alienación también tiene su belleza" — *narrative memory* — is not only discursive, but also performative through the characters named *Diamantina* and the literary memory echoed.

We can explore this performativity by attending to the specific political and literary geography of this narrative. The narrator attempts to establish an intermediate space at the border of translation and creation by performing the grandmother's language in present-day New York, but this choice involves difficult cultural and political ramifications. In the short story, Federico Hoffman is the opposite of the present-day *Diamantina*. The nameless translator's new lover belongs to a socialist organization — he is an electrician by trade and quickly recruits her as a translator for the organization. The process of recruitment highlights once again the opposition of the translator with *Diamantina*. For instance, when the translator meets the other members of the organization she lies about her job position as a love letters' translator:

[...] esa noche, cuando me preguntaron acerca de mi trabajo, me dio una pena enorme decirles que traducía cartas de amor para una cosmetóloga capitalista en un *penthouse* ubicado en el corazón de Manhattan. En su lugar, inventé que cuidaba niños para una matrona irregular de nombre *Diamantina Skvorc* (Rivera Garza 2002, 58).

The translator's performance goes beyond the language of the old *Diamantina*; she also performs a counter identity to what the present-day *Diamantina* (the entrepreneur) represents and emphasizes two opposing ideologies in the short-story. The protagonist joins the socialist organization as a pamphlets' translator, continues her lust filled relationship with Federico Hoffman, and marries him as it was professed in "Spanish", she claims: "Una mañana de abril, antes de las diez, como el destino en español lo había dicho" (Rivera Garza 2002, 61). *Narrative memory* in this text brings into view the unfolding of the name *Diamantina* across different temporalities and spaces. Rivera Garza comments on the contemporary relationship between the two homelands of the protagonists, and their cultural disjunction, which she makes present through the way they both embody *Diamantina*.

This name also inhabits the author's 1999 novel *Nadie me verá llorar* (*No One will See Me Cry*), where two characters named *Diamantina* also make an appearance; in this novel centered on post-revolutionary Mexico and La Castañeda — a veridic insane asylum in the outskirts of Mexico City — *Diamantina* is embodied by a pianist, who is also a labor activist. Ligia, a prostitute of the brothel "La Modernidad" in the novel is also given the nickname "Diamantina". Matilda is one of the *Diamantina*'s lovers before she leaves Mexico City to continue her revolutionary activist efforts. This *narrative memory* is crucial to highlight the contrasts between these characters across Rivera Garza's texts and the intertextuality she utilizes. One of the common threads between the fictional *Diamantinas* is the portrayal of independent, revolutionary (each in their own way), solitary, strong women: "Tenía sólo un par de zapatos y un sobretodo, ambos negros. No había un solo adorno sobre las altas paredes amarillentas de la habitación. Además de la mesita de noche y la cama, el lugar estaba vacío. Un cuarto sin muebles: eso era *Diamantina*" (Rivera Garza 1999, 47). This description in the voice of Joaquin, one *Diamantina*'s lovers in *Nadie me verá llorar*, highlights the type of life she lives. Her ideologies resemble the austerity of her life as she makes clear to Joaquin not long after they meet:

Entre sus muchas ensoñaciones, una de las más recurrentes consistía en prenderle fuego a un banco. El banco de Londres y México. O a una cárcel, la de Belén. Quería ocasionar un incendio monumental que arrasara con todo para que, después de la destrucción, el mundo empezara a rodar de nuevo (Rivera Garza 1999, 47).

Her ideologies will eventually take her out of México city to support labor movements— her character disappears from the novel at this point, but allusions to her by former lovers continue.

Across Rivera Garza's work the *Diamantinas* portray alternative representations of performing nation, beyond what has been celebrated by Lopez Velarde. In *Nadie me verá llorar* the historical context echoed is that of Mexico, specifically of Mexico City between 1900–1920. Although the novel centers on the political issues of this period, it also spans out to cover the life of one of the protagonist Matilda Burgos, from 1885-1958, who is madly in love with the revolutionary *Diamantina*. Brian Price in "Cristina Rivera Garza en las orillas de la historia", argues the author's fiction seeks to unveil untold stories during the post-revolutionary period, specifically:

[...] ésta se dedica a contar las historias periféricas que han sido arrolladas por la narración hegemónica que surge en los años posteriores al triunfo constitucionalista

[...] ella efectivamente afirma que hay historias olvidadas, ignoradas, paralelas e igualmente mexicanas (1)

Price bases his analysis within the literary context of the Mexican revolution and the canon that emerged from it. Rivera Garza's reevaluation of this period has been analyzed from political and sociological perspectives, especially due to Rivera Garza's scholarly interests on the mental hospital "La Castañeda"<sup>4</sup>. Departing from this type of narrative strategy, the politically and literary charged name *Diamantina* and the way Rivera Garza uses it within the transnational context of "La alienación también tiene su belleza" emphasizes the ways she contests patriotic and celebratory national discourses during the revolutionary and post-revolutionary period.

Ramón López Velarde's "Suave Patria" is an extensive rendition to Mexico — a total of thirty-four stanzas. In 1921's, López Velarde's poem, Mexico's daily life is pictured against the image of chaste and properly dressed women: "Suave Patria: te amo no cual mito,/ sino por tu verdad de pan bendito;/ como a niña que asoma por la reja/ con la blusa corrida hasta la oreja/ y la falda bajada hasta el huesito"(Velarde 304). As Raúl Leiva argues in his critical analysis of the poem, "la patria" is portrayed as a woman: "Es, pues, un poema en donde la patria posee todas las virtudes de la mujer, una creación poética colmada de música, color, dimensión, olor y táctiles esencias;" (Leiva 11). As it is also argued by Leiva, Lopez Velarde's portrayal seeks to celebrate a nation that is still growing and looking inward (12). The poem emphasizes a period disrupted by the revolution, but also commemorates Mexico's first independent century from Spain. The portrayal of this period's complexity can be found through the thirty-four stanzas, but it is at the end of the poem—in the second and final "act" and its final stanza— where the poet elevates his prideful dedication and connection to the nation as erotic and as that of a desired woman:

Si me ahogo en tus julios, a mí baja  
desde el vergel de tu peinado denso  
frescura de rebozo y de tinaja,  
y si tiritó, dejas que me arroje  
en tu respiración azul de incienso  
y en tus carnosos labios de rompopo.

[...]

Sé igual y fiel; pupilas de abandono;  
sedienta voz, la trigarante faja  
en tus pechugas al vapor; y un trono  
a la intemperie, cual una sonaja:  
la carretera alegórica de paja.  
(304)

This is the junction where Rivera Garza deviates from and posits an opposition; Lopez Velarde presents commemoration through thrones and fresh rebozos; a prideful nation and women's eroticism to be admired in the midst of a changing country after a violent revolution. The poem's final stanza proposes fidelity and stability: "sé igual y fiel [...]" , Rivera Garza, on the other hand, portrays a country where no such reasons to celebrate exist and discontent prevails.

Rivera Garza has commented on this poem, not only through her fiction — as it has been asserted — but also in her cultural criticism. In *Dolerse – Textos desde un país herido* (2011) Rivera Garza explores the role violence has played in Mexico and how the Mexican government has handle understanding, condemning, and taking actions against this violence. In this book, the author considers the role of the verb "to be in pain" (*doler* in Spanish) as a way of acknowledging the systematic "numbness" of the State when it comes to the "pain" of its citizens; in the introduction Rivera Garza demands that actions should be taken to reconstitute empathy – to understand the pain and horror its society has endured throughout many decades of drug cartels, kidnappings, and senseless violence. The book is comprised of different genres and as it has been argued by the author that is a call to action; the texts included in this collection of essays, poems, and cultural criticism, follow the tradition of Latin America's citizen-led social movements:

Se trata de que, mientras otros tantos con nosotros demandemos la restitución de un *Estado con entrañas* – el mismo objetivo tenían, por cierto, Madres de plaza de Mayo ante las atrocidades de la Junta Militar en Argentina, y el movimiento de las Arpilleras en Chile cuando trataban de contradecir el horror de Pinochet, entre otros tantos movimientos generados por grupos alternativos de la sociedad – podamos articular la desarticulación muda con que nos atosiga el estado espeluznante de las cosas a través de estrategias escriturales que en lugar de promover la preservación del

poder, active más bien el potencial crítico y utópico del lenguaje (Rivera Garza 2011, 14).

In line with this statement — the relevancy of voicing demands against oppressive and violent regimes — in the inaugurating section of this book titled "Los sufrientes", Rivera Garza echoes the voice of a citizen to counterpoint the inactions of the Mexican government when it came to a violent killing of teenagers at a party in the Northern city of Ciudad Juárez; in this poem of many voices titled "La reclamante", Rivera Garza cites López Velarde as she makes clear at the end of it by including a footnote and citing him in the bibliography of her book, although there are no in-text citations of his poetry: "\*Textos de Luz María Dávila, Ramón López Velarde, Sandra Rodríguez Nieto y Cristina Rivera Garza" (Rivera Garza 31, 2011); in its stanzas, the author inserts selections of phrases by Luz María Dávila — the mother of two of the boys killed in the party — addressed to the ex-president of Mexico, Felipe Calderón in a forced visit to the city where he talked to the citizens about the violent crimes:

Discúlpeme, Señor Presidente, pero no le doy  
la mano  
usted no es mi amigo. Yo  
no le puedo dar la bienvenida  
Usted no es bienvenido

nadie lo es.  
*Luz María Dávila, Villas de Salvárcar, madre de Marcos*  
*Y José Luis Piña Dávila de 19 y 17 años de edad*  
(Rivera Garza 2011, 29).

The public appearance of the president was perceived as "minimal" to counteract the gruesome assassinations by "sicarios" (hired assassins) of the group of teenagers. Rivera Garza rescues the voice of the mother, which amid a media storm that deemed the teenagers as members of organized crime — she forcibly asks for justice and accountability for all those dead and disappeared during Calderón's presidency<sup>5</sup>. The voice of the mother is intertwined with references to López Velarde, Sandra Rodríguez Nieto — a prominent journalist that reported on these events — and Rivera Garza, but only "Suave patria" is included in the bibliography of the book. The reference to the poem — in addition to Rodríguez Nieto and the author herself — is only through tonality. There are no direct quotations from the poem. The *narrative memory* of the poem seeks to highlight the voice of Dávila and reimagine a patriotic poem of López Velarde to Mexico within the context of cartel violence and 21<sup>st</sup> century México. In the collaborative essay about Rivera Garza's poetry, "La ficción más grande: la poesía de Cristina Rivera Garza" the authors argue that in "La reclamante":

Esta voz que enlaza organiza transportes de imaginarios,

de palabras, de sonidos, registra fragmentos y los modela en la colindancia con un ritmo nuevo, recurrencias, vueltas de palabras, de versos: fértil colisión semántica y sonora de lejanas profundidades entre las cuevas afloran también palabras y tonalidad de Ramón López Velarde (Castro Palma, Galland Boudon and Torres Ponce 169).

The reoccurrence of this poem in Rivera Garza's oeuvre is a constant point of critical reflection for the author. The tonality and adjectives used in "La reclamante" is a new reading of the poem as the author clarifies: "Luz María Dávila, una trabajadora de una maquiladora de bocinas, había pronunciado palabras que, siendo como eran poderosas y trémulas, también eran básicas y certeras. Por esa razón, decidí entonces resaltar esas palabras suyas, mezclándolas con las de Sandra Rodríguez Nieto, una de las periodistas que reportó los eventos; así como con algunos adjetivos de Ramón López Velarde el poeta que releía por enésima vez en ese entonces" (Rivera Garza 2010). "Suave Patria" is read by Rivera Garza through a contemporary imaginary of homeland and women, *Diamantinas*, and poetic voice.

The *narrative memory* of the name confronted in "La alienación también tiene su belleza" by Rivera Garza is essential to understand the ways gender has functioned in Mexican national discourses. The author extends this critique across geopolitical spaces in this short story — through Houston and New York City — and we can explore this performative discourse by attending to the specific political and literary geography of this narrative. The translator strips her own identity to become somebody else. To highlight these praxes of embodiment and performance in this short story we can draw from Diana Taylor's proposals on performing cultural memory in *The Archive and the Repertoire* (2003).

On her chapter, "Memory as a Culture Practice" the academic Diana Taylor challenges notions that individuals or groups are a stable identity for transmitting events that happen around them. She argues, instead, bodies participate in the transmission of knowledge and memory, that is impossible to separate cultural memory, race, and gender: "The bodies participating in the transmission of knowledge and memory are themselves a product of certain taxonomic, disciplinary, and mnemonic systems. Gender impacts how these bodies participate, as does ethnicity" (Taylor 86). Considering this, it can be argued that in the literary space of the short story the translator through an association to a literary past, attempts to establish herself. This alignment exposes the ideological and political differences that separate the two *Diamantinas* in the story, but also the "other" *Diamantinas* in Rivera Garza's texts. The translator accomplishes this task by appropriating the language of the elder *Diamantina* through her relationship with Hoffman. By performing the epistolary memory of the grandmother, the narrator distances herself from and embodies a different kind of imagery of the nation. It is one that is not gendered pristine and glittering as the translation of the letters will reveal.

The translation and transposition of romantic discourse in this story seduces Federico Hoffman, but it also generates dilemmas. If translation cannot act as a physical bridge, it does function as an intermediate position between linguistic spaces, and as an intermediate position between reflection and liberation. In *Illuminations* (1986), Walter Benjamin argues that the task of the translator is to liberate another language through one's own: "It is the task of the translator to release in his own language that pure language that is under the spell of another, to liberate the language imprisoned in a work in his re-creation of that work" (80). The translator accomplishes this task by recreating and imitating the language of the elder Diamantina through her relationship with Hoffman. It is thus through an association to a literary past, and through an act of reading and performance, the translator attempts to establish herself. Yet through these acts, the narrator also distances herself from and confronts the emblem of an American political and economic ideology: a capitalist who whitewashes her Mexican heritage to promote cosmetics and politicians indiscriminately. For this reason, the translator continues her relationship with Hoffman, since unlike Diamantina, he does not seek to profit from the privilege of association with a European surname or heritage. He is a part-time volunteer electrician for a socialist organization. The translator prefers this world instead of the corporate one Diamantina both inhabits and embodies.

The interconnection between body, performance, and diamantina goes beyond Rivera Garza's (non)fictional corpus as the "Glitter Revolution" exemplifies. As the role of gender and "patria" have been traced in this article, through Lopez Velarde's post-Mexican revolution nation building poetry and Rivera Garza's contemporary texts, it is essential to highlight that "diamantina" has also appeared in the concrete streets and monuments of México. "La revolución diamantina" or the "Glitter Revolution" as it became known during the summer of 2019 in Mexico City was a movement to protest institutionalized sexual violence perpetrated by police forces in the country. On August, 16<sup>th</sup> 2019 over three hundred demonstrators gathered to demand public accountability for Mexico's long history of femicides: "The protestors spray-painted graffiti on the building [Mexico City prosecutor's office] and the historical monument "El Angel de la Independencia," painted the word "rapists" on the wall of a nearby police station, and covered Security Minister Jesús Orta Martínez in pink glitter" (Poole). Their public outcry for justice was in glitter. This revolution was "bright", as the use of "diamantina" was meant to be seen everywhere, to be hard to miss, and as in Rivera Garza's "La reclamante", it was a public act. Glitter in "la revolución diamantina" serves as a tool to denunciate acts of gender-based violence and demand accountability for acts of impunity. As this event exemplifies, "diamantina" is not only part of the literary memory echoed by Rivera Garza, but it is also an essential component of Mexico's recent cultural memory and feminist's movements in this country.

After eight weeks of performing and living through the writing

of the elder Diamantina the translator in the short-story must hand over her translations. The letters recount the story of the grandmother's clandestine romance at the age of seventeen and describe the "surrender" of her heart – and body – to her lover Pedro González Martínez. Crucially, the letters also detail his crossing of the border into the United States to forge a future for him and his lover. The present-day Diamantina is not surprised by the content, but by the tears the translator cries after she shares her grandmother never married Pedro. But what most captures the translator's attention is the eventual strategic use the grandmother made of these letters: she never reunited with her lover, but emigrated to San Antonio de Coahuila, Texas, where she married a lawyer named Ignacio López Castro for whom no background information is given in the story; though the marriage was unhappy and abusive –the short story details– the court did not grant the initial divorce the grandmother requested claiming mistreatment and adultery by her husband. Undeterred, the grandmother brought a suit against herself, and offered her letters to her young past lover as proof of adultery, becoming one of the first divorced women in Texas (Rivera Garza 2002, 63). These revelations re-contextualize the letters for the translator, but also the backdrop of the story.

Through its emphasis on the city of New York, the story alludes to the historical-cultural past of Latin American immigration<sup>6</sup>. The exploration of the epistolary genre and the history of a Mexican woman from the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century living in Texas, highlights cultural tensions and rifts. Diamantina attempts to resolve these tensions through translation, hiring someone fluent in both the history of Mexico and the Spanish language. However, resolution proves to be impossible, because the letters present not only a language, but ideological postures that require translation. The grandmother stayed single until the end of her life, and lived happily as the translator expresses: "Sin casarse y sola, como ella quería, toda la libertad para ella solita en San Antonio, Texas [...] Sin nadie que la parara. De una persona a otra, sin ningún lazo de sangre, flotando ligera de aquí a allá, sin respetar fronteras" (Rivera Garza 2002, 64). The events that lie beyond the frame of the letters do not evoke the same love story, but it too represents a heritage that has effects on the literary present: towards the end of the story, the narrator abandons Hoffman, and New York City. She chooses to leave the circumstances that had allowed her to perform along the edges of linguistic, political and cultural borders. The translator, unlike Hoffman, does not spurn the state of alienation, because according to her, it also possesses a certain beauty (Rivera Garza 2002, 59).

By presenting the effects of *narrative memory* through the translator, Rivera Garza stages a critical exploration of literary canonical memory and patria. Though the story initially traces the trajectory of migration and assimilation represented by the cosmetics entrepreneur, its narrator (the translator) aligns herself with the grandmother, a rebel figure who portrays a defiance against cultural and social norms. This portrayal presents an

opposition to the images of Mexican women lauded in "Suave Patria"—the reflections on this literary past is done by embodying its adjective "diamantina". Rivera Garza's strategy to reimagine a literary discourse that was instrumental to memorialize an image of post-revolutionary Mexico provides oppositional representations. The multiple representations of *Diamantina* in Rivera Garza's "La alienación también tiene su belleza" and *Nadie me verá llorar*

establish her continuous engagement in this endeavor; it also becomes a tool of protest in *Dolerse: textos desde un país herido* (2011), which can be threaded to the physical *diamantina* used by protestors in recent public demonstrations against femicides and gender-based violence. In "La alineación también tiene su belleza" this critique crosses borders and centers New York City as a space of reflection of a now transnational literary history.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Distinguished Professor in Hispanic Studies, University of Houston

<sup>2</sup>There is no English translation of this book.

<sup>3</sup>"Alienation Also Possesses Beauty", there is no English translation of this text. The translations of this text in this article are mine.

<sup>4</sup> Cristina Rivera Garza's publication on "La Castañeda": "Dangerous Minds: Changing Psychiatric Views of the Mentally Ill in Porfirian Mexico, 1876–1911.", "Por la salud mental de la nación: vida cotidiana y Estado en el Manicomio General de La Castañeda, México, 1910–1930.", "She neither Respected nor Obeyed Anyone": Inmates and Psychiatrists Debate Gender and Class at the General Insane Asylum La Castañeda, Mexico, 1910–1930." and *La Castañeda. Narrativas dolientes desde el Manicomio General. México, 1910–1930*. Mexico City: Tusquets, 2010.

<sup>5</sup> "The number of people who went missing in Mexico during the six years of former President Felipe Calderon's administration stands at 26,121, government officials said Tuesday, a figure that would rank

among the worst episodes of "disappearances" in Latin American history" (Sanchez); "According to the National Commission on Human Rights, more than 7,000 people killed in Mexico in the past six years lie unidentified in morgue freezers or common graves." (Booth).

<sup>6</sup> It is productive to point out that since the 19th century, New York has been a privileged space for the unfolding and articulation of cultural and political conflicts between Latin America and the United States. Historically the city has been an important site for reflecting on the cultural and political fate of Latin Americans. As prime example of this, the Cuban writer and intellectual José Martí is an essential figure from this period. Martí left an immense journalistic, literary and political corpus documenting not only his trips to New York, but also his political exile in the city from which he supported the liberation of Cuba from Spain during the 1880's. Between 1880 and 1893, Martí published more than 400 chronicles about Spanish America, the United States, and Europe. The legacy of Martí's writing about the city has been widely acknowledged by contemporary writers.

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