Back to the Future: Mothers, Languages, and Homes in Cristina García's *Dreaming in Cuban*

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The complex discourse of the mother-daughter relationship, as well as the imaginative inscription of the lost homeland, occupies a prominent place in the thematics of immigrant literature in the United States. Ethnic writing in general often reflects gender conflicts transmitted through culturally constructed but frequently misinterpreted roles, specifically those of mothers. Emblematic novels such as Maxine Hong Kingston's *Woman Warrior* and Toni Morrison's *Beloved* revolve around ambivalent relationships with the mother or mother figure, as well as other female members of the family. These texts are frequently narrated by protagonists who must necessarily deal with the implications of specific maternal discourse (or the lack thereof) in the process of self-identification and affirmation. The place of the mother — personally, socially, culturally — directs, modifies, and influences the daughters' responses to both individual and cultural demands. Ethnic texts such as these highlight questions of identification with and differentiation from the mother, emphasizing a need for understanding and bonding between mothers and daughters as a fundamental step toward self-awareness and mastery of the culture. Often the texts imply the need for the daughter to take on and continue maternal stories, transforming them literally and metaphorically with their own lives and experiences.

Cultural inscriptions by ethnic women offer an interesting analysis of the hermeneutics of female representation and access to the world, yet cannot be divorced from forms of orientation toward the mother or foremother. The pattern of the maternal figure as origin and daughter as perpetuation, extension, or completion repeatedly appears as a necessary starting point to the drama of the tenuous negotiation of identity and difference within the ambivalent universe of filiality. As Nancy Chodorow has pointed out, "In any given society, feminine personality comes to define itself in relation and connection to other people more than masculine personality does" (44). Emphasis on relationships leads to a reevaluation of personal and communal tragedies that oblige the daughters to look back to the mothers, whose image and personality are often inseparable from community history and values. These texts often involve a return to the maternal, which leads to the appreciation of community history and forging of communal bonds with, first, the immediate family and then the larger gender and cultural group.

The novel here analyzed, Cristina García's *Dreaming in Cuban*, centers on the complicated negotiations of mother-daughter bonds. García tells the stories of three generations of Cuban women and their experiences with revolution and immigration through a blending of first- and third-person narrations, with epistolary sections that convey the rich texture of intersecting positionalities and overlapping worlds. At the center of the novel is Pilar Puente, born in Cuba and raised in Brooklyn, who must deal with her antipathetic relationship with her mother, Lourdes, and her longing for her grandmother, Celia. Similarly, Lourdes and Felicia, Celia's two daughters, struggle to unravel their complex ties with their mother as well as those with their own daughters. The novel thus presents a composite portrait of diverse mother-daughter relationships, offering a multiperspective vision of the possibilities for division and unity, adaptation and adjustment, separation and bonding. The mother-daughter dance of approach and withdrawal is mirrored in the separate and interrelated sections on each of the characters, the shifts in temporality, geography, and narrative voice illustrating the tangled web of affinity between and among the characters and their homelands.

In the tradition of breaking silence that has become one of the shaping myths in ethnic writing by women, maternal storytelling becomes a medium of self-inscription and subjectivity, as well as an instrument of intersubjectivity and dialogue. The separate accounts of all the characters, mothers and daughters, are converted into chronicles of individual empowerment and self-affirmation. García opts for a narrative stance that includes multiple voices, offering individual versions of events and engaging in complex dialogues. There is, further, a sense of collectivity in the text, according to which the diverse voices that speak discern self-referential hints at definition through the juxtaposition of the other voices in the narrative. The concept of the isolated self is continually questioned, as the individual accounts

are repeatedly mirrored, contrasting or complementing preceding or succeeding stories. Thus, the individual voices that meditate on the mothers' and daughters' multilayered selves are inseparable from the other voices in the text, coalescing to represent the family to which these women belong. The process of unearth-ing maternal and communal stories becomes an essential part of the process of self-identification, linked to the discovery of the mother and the mother's history, cultural possibilities, and choices. Cultural identification, and the recovery of a bond with the heritage culture, arises from the irrevocable connection between self and community, as issues of origins and beginnings occupy center stage in the drama of self-affirmation. According to Lorna Irvine, the process of discovery — the "psychological journey" — of the daughter's own identity demands a revision of the relationship with the mother, and this often involves three stages: negation, recognition, and reconciliation (248). The need to go "back to the future" implies the urgency of appropriating the intricate truths about one's self and history as part of the process of self-affirmation. The immigrant characters in García's novel — Lourdes and Pilar — need to return to Cuba in order to come to terms with the tangled meanings of mothering, language, and home, and renew their lives in the United States.

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Ethnic and cultural factors, such as the serious difficulty of mutual decoding of social signs, are central to the linguistic misunderstanding between mothers and daughters. Language plays a central role in this process, as the exercise of female self-definition develops within the nuances of meaning, of understandings and misunderstandings, of significance misconstrued or unaccepted. In the isolation enforced by these misunderstandings, the characters explore a widening sphere of forms of communication: from telepathy to painting. The process of self-identification, therefore, involves issues of pain and resistance: remembering, understanding, and articulating significance within the female matrix. The most important lesson the daughters in the novel learn, as articulated by Chodorow, is that "differentiation is not distinctness and separateness, but a particular way of being connected to others" (11). They learn the distinction between division and differentiation, understanding that while division prevails, there can never be completion. As Chodorow explains, "In the process of differentiation, leading to a genuine autonomy, people maintain contact with those with whom they had their earliest relationships: indeed this contact is part of who we are" (10–11). Separation and death may be overcome by reconstructing both the cultural past and the image of the mother, achieving a reconciliation with the maternal through and within language and by re-creating the idea of home. The final section suggests the protagonist's appropriation of the foremothers' voices and stories, to bring the cycle of generation and regeneration to completion.

Dreaming in Cuban explores the various dimensions of the drama of a family divided by Castro's takeover of Cuba in 1959. As William Luis points out, García's novel weaves intricate layers of Cuban history, politics, literature, and culture, both on the island and in the United States, echoing the work of such Cuban literary masters as Cirilo Villaverde and Reinaldo Arenas, who also abandoned the island and lived in exile (203). Political events and loyalties lead Rufino, Lourdes, and Pilar Puente to immigrate to the United States in 1961, leaving behind Lourdes's parents, Celia and Jorge del Pino, as well as her sister Felicia and the latter's family. Jorge will eventually leave Cuba for medical treatment in the United States, and will die there. Events in recent Cuban history become the central subtext for the novel: Pilar was born ten days after the victory that forced Batista to flee the island and three days after Castro's triumphant march into Havana; the novel ends with Felicia's son Ivanito's escape to freedom.

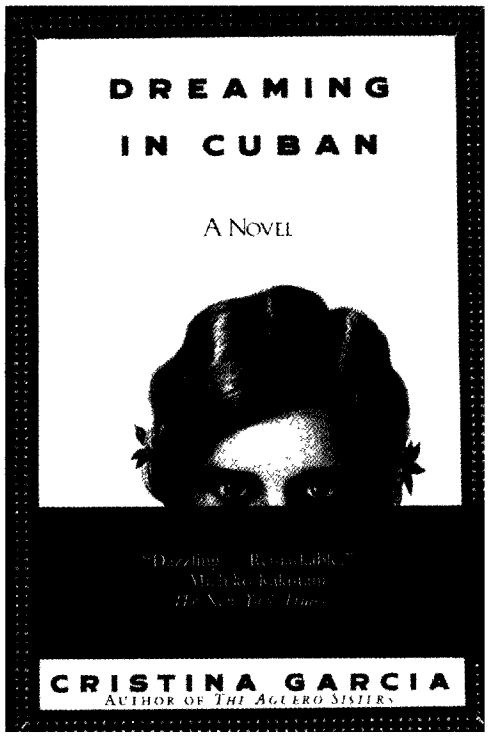
The present time of the narrative develops between 1972 and 1980 and refers to specific events in the Revolution. Luis has analyzed extensively the specific events of recent Cuban history that García incorporates into the subtext of her narrative: the failed ten-million-ton sugar harvest of 1970, the detention of the poet Heberto Padilla, and the seizing of the Peruvian embassy in April 1980, which was followed by the Mariel boatlift that enabled more than 125,000 Cubans to escape to Miami (206–8).

The blending of historical detail is central to Pilar's search for self, as she comes to terms with her position regarding the Cuban Revolution, the central point of contention with her mother. At the beginning of the novel, she rejects her mother's patriotic American values — "She bought a second bakery and plans to sell tricolor cupcakes and Uncle Sam marzipan. Apple pies, too. She's convinced she can fight Communism from behind her bakery counter" (136) — sympathizing with the

Cuban cause embodied in the figure of her grandmother. At the end, after witnessing life in Cuba for herself, and incorporating her grandmother's, aunt's, cousins', and mother's stories, she appears to become independent of her previous ideas. She lies to her grandmother about Ivanito's departure, implicitly assenting to his defection.

Pilar's process is highlighted by García's complex ordering of the narrative. The author frequently juxtaposes present and past tense, blurring and confounding the two time frames: rather than presenting a chronological account, she invites the reader to reconstruct the sequence of events — from the first story, set in 1972, to the last piece, a letter written in 1959. Furthermore, as Jorge Duany explains, the geographic transition from Cuba to the United States is often imperceptible, because that is the way the characters experience the transition: "There is no radical discontinuity in time and space between the two sides of the del Pino family, one in Cuba, the other in the United States. The family is spiritually united by common memories and fantasies, by their image of Cuba" (177).

Section and story titles like "Imagining Winter" and "Going South" are paradigmatic of the journeys many of the characters have to take, away from and back to their original home, emphasizing the search for connection which will be completed in the final section, "The Languages Lost." The last line of the novel, from Celia's final letter to her Spanish lover, presents the charge given to Pilar, which she metafictionally completes through the novel. On 11 January 1959 she writes: "Dear Gustavo, The revolution is eleven days old. My granddaughter, Pilar Puente del Pino, was born today. It is also my birthday. I am fifty years old. I will no longer write to you, *mi amor*. She will remember everything" (245). Pilar's trip to Cuba, when she inherits the letters her grandmother never sent to Gustavo, makes her understand that she belongs to a family as well as to Cuban history and culture. This discovery enables her to decipher the master codes of her increasingly complex subjectivity, allowing her to signify on her own, yet within the network of women of which she forms an inextricable part. Even Pilar's surname, "Puente," highlights her role as a bridge between the place and the people of the past and the future.



Thus, the recounting in Pilar's voice acquires a forceful emotional tone that rings clearly through the entire novel, transforming the story into a female bildungsroman. Furthermore, when questioned in an interview about the nature of the novel, García admits that "emotionally, it's very autobiographical. The details are not. . . . Pilar is a kind of alter ego for me" (López, 610). Cristina García and Pilar Puente share biographical similarities, and the text may be read as both a valedictory and a catharsis for a young woman dealing with the events and characters in her past.

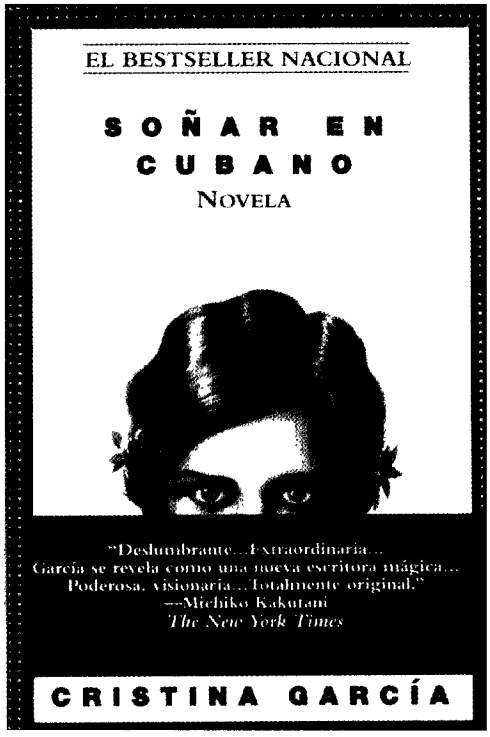
Crucial to the evolving relationship with the past is the figure of the mother, an image expanded in the novel to include both mother language and motherland. In the same movement, Lourdes abandons her mother and motherland, physically and emotionally, rejecting the communism that both espouse. Celia's relationship with her elder daughter is sour from the start, as she suffers from the loss of her Spanish lover and the abuse by Jorge's mother and sister. The awareness of her mother's rejection of her clouds Lourdes's infancy.

> She imagined herself alone and shriveled in her mother's womb, envisioned the first days in her mother's unyielding arms. Her mother's fingers were stiff and splayed as spoons, her milk a tasteless gray. Her mother stared at her with eyes collapsed of expectation. If it's true that babies learn love from their mothers' voices, then this is what Lourdes heard: "I will not remember her name." (74)

Celia's other daughter, Felicia, also abandons her through her consistent indifference to the revolutionary cause, and her eventual sinking into madness: "After all, as her mother points out, the only thing Felicia ever did for the revolution was pull a few dandelions during the weed-eradication campaign in 1962, and then only reluctantly. Her lack of commitment is a source of great rancour between them" (107).

The generational divisions extend to Lourdes and her daughter Pilar, who nonetheless has a powerful sense of connection with Abuela Celia, and also to Felicia and her revolutionary twin daughters, Luz and Milagro. Interestingly, familial and generational patterns develop to which all the characters adhere. The generational opposition between Celia and her two daughters, Lourdes and Felicia, is repeated in the next generation between Lourdes and Felicia and their own daughters, Pilar, Luz, and Milagro (Luis, 211). Still, similarities and connections are perceived between mothers and daughters, even those separated by an ocean. For instance, both Celia and Lourdes serve law and order, the mother as a civilian judge of her neighborhood defense committee and the daughter as an "auxiliary policewoman, the first in her precinct" (127). Pilar also acknowledges seeing her mother in herself: "If I don't like someone, I show it. It's the one thing I have in common with my mother" (135).

The difficulties between Lourdes and Pilar are a metaphor for all the other mother-daughter dyads. Both perceive clearly the gap between them. Pilar notes that "Mom's views are strictly black-and-white. That's how she survives" (26), and Lourdes admits that she "has no patience for dreamers, for people who live between black and white" (129), such as her own mother and daughter. Celia muses: "If I was born to live on an island, then I'm grateful for one thing: that the tides rearrange the borders. At least I have the illusion of change, of possibility" (99), an attitude she shares with her granddaughter. On the one hand, Lourdes is consistently maddened by Pilar's immunity to threats, her "indifference" (128), while the daughter suffers from her mother's unpredictability. When Lourdes asks Pilar to paint a mural for her new bakery, and agrees not to see it before the official unveiling, the daughter cannot fathom her mother's intentions. Lourdes looks at Pilar with an expression "as if to say, 'See, you always underestimate me.' But that's not true. If anything, I overestimate her. It comes from experience. Mom is arbitrary and inconsistent and always believes she's right. It's a pretty irritating combination" (140).



Interestingly, both turn to the past — the dead father and the far-off grandmother — for advice. Jorge del Pino reassures Lourdes: "Pilar doesn't hate you, *hija*. She just hasn't learned to love you yet" (74). Similarly, Pilar takes reassurance from Celia: "I might be afraid of her if it weren't for those talks I have with Abuela Celia late at night. She tells me that my mother is sad inside and that her anger is more frustration at what she can't change. I guess I'm one of those things she can't change" (63). Yet when Pilar's blasphemous punk version of the Statue of Liberty is finally unveiled, the patriotic Lourdes rushes to her daughter's defense and protects the mural from a man who threatens to rip it with a knife: "Then, as if in slow motion, she tumbles forward, a thrashing avalanche of patriotism and motherhood, crushing three spectators and a table of apple tartlets. And I, I love my mother very much at that moment" (144).

As opposed to other mother-daughter narratives, this text highlights the daughters' connections with their fathers, and that of the mothers with their sons. Lourdes and Jorge del Pino, Pilar and Rufino Puente, even Luz, Milagro, and Hugo Villaverde share a relationship that all the mothers envy. Celia perceives the affection between her husband and daughter, a world closed to her: "That girl is a stranger to me. When I approach her, she turns numb, as if she wanted to be dead in my presence. I see how different Lourdes is with her father, so alive and gay, and it hurts me, but I don't know what to do. She still punishes me for the early years" (163). Moreover, "Lourdes is herself only with her father. Even after his death, they understand each other perfectly, as they always have" (131). The disconnection between mothers and daughters finds a foil in the bond between mothers and sons. Javier del Pino returns to Cuba and his mother when his wife abandons him, taking their daughter. Felicia and Ivanito live happily for a while in a dream-world of poetry and coconut ice cream. Lourdes fantasizes about the son she miscarried: "He wouldn't have talked back to her or taken drugs or drunk beer from paper bags like other teenagers. *Her* son would have helped her in the bakery without

complaint. He would have come to her for guidance, pressed her hand to his cheek, told her he loved her. Lourdes would have talked to her son the way Rufino talks to Pilar, for companionship" (129). She thus, at the end of the novel, adopts the motherless Ivanito and helps him escape from Cuba.

The positive emphasis on the father-daughter and mother-son relationship, as opposed to the problematic mother-daughter one, may also have its roots in Spanish/Cuban culture. Sons tend to be revered over daughters in these families, and García blends this customary dynamic into her text, to complicate the central issue further. Sons traditionally enjoy preferential treatment in these families, though fathers are also inclined to pamper their daughters. The latter are, nevertheless, viewed by the mothers as extensions of themselves and are therefore treated more harshly, for they had to learn to be prepared for life. On the contrary, mothers openly indulge their sons, the future of the family and the country. This reality offers another layer of meaning to the text as a sociocultural construct: García appears to suggest that the dynamic of conventional family relationships becomes another obstacle to the desired mother-daughter attachment.

Knowledge of a shared communication between Pilar and her grandmother serves to help reconstruct the matrilineal bond, forging the link with the mother country and its language as well. Between these two exists the attachment that both lack with Lourdes: "I wonder how Mom could be Abuela Celia's daughter. And what I'm doing as my mother's daughter. Something got horribly scrambled along the way" (178). Celia provides Pilar with the connection to the maternal line, mother tongue, and homeland her mother had severed, as well as a sense of security and self-worth.

> I feel much more connected to Abuela Celia than to Mom, even though I haven't seen my grandmother in seventeen years. We don't speak at night anymore, but she's left me her legacy nonetheless — a love for the sea and the smoothness of pearls, an appreciation of music and words, sympathy for the underdog, and a disregard for boundaries. Even in silence, she gives me the confidence to do what I believe is right, to trust my own perceptions. (176)

This link has loaded implications for the nature of narrating memory and the constructing of a multivoiced text. Because of their affiliation, Pilar can construct the text, the metafictional implication being the continuation of the cycle of women's stories within a culture-specific ambience: "Women who outlive their daughters are orphans, Abuela tells me. Only their granddaughters can save them, guard their knowledge like the first fire" (222). The diary Pilar keeps becomes a repository of stories which will help her piece together her life, becoming the text the reader receives, as Isabel Alvarez-Borland suggests (46). She will thus appropriate the voices of the women who are part of the del Pino family saga — her grandmother, mother, aunt, cousins, and even her aunt's friend, Herminia Delgado — arriving at a deeper understanding of each one's motivations and actions. The metafictional detail suggests the continuance of the female line, and the narrative becomes the vehicle through which the wounds are healed and the pain of exile overcome.

Language functions in *Dreaming in Cuban* as a measuring device for gauging both connection and separation, loyalty and abandonment, between families and land. The languages each learns, speaks, and passes on illustrate diverse attachments, just as the lack of a common language signals the severance of a bond. As Mary Vásquez points out, Celia's poetic idiom passes to her daughter, Felicia, for example, but not to Lourdes, for whom even her mother speaks a foreign tongue; it is her father's deprecating rhetoric that becomes Lourdes's legacy (23). By extension, foreignness in the novel becomes "a metaphor for separation and estrangement: it can exist as fully within a family home as in exile in an alien land. Indeed, individual language in the novel's world becomes an emblem, and expression of foreignness becomes impenetrability, the ultimate isolation to which each of García's characters is condemned" (Vásquez, 23). In the novel, language loss is directly related to the exile experience, often serving as a metaphor for existential alienation (Alvarez-Borland, 46). Because Pilar left Cuba at the age of two, language loss for her is a given. Celia reflects that "Pilar, her first grandchild, writes to her from Brooklyn in a Spanish that is no longer hers. She speaks the hard-edged lexicon of bygone tourists itchy to throw dice on green felt or asphalt" (7). Although, as an adult, Pilar reflects that "English seems an impossible language for intimacy" (180), it is the language she grows up speaking, and, more important, the language in which she records her family's story.

Attitudes toward language separate mothers and daughters: Lourdes believes that "immigration has redefined her, and she is grateful. . . . She welcomes her adopted language, its possibilities for reinvention. . . . She wants no part of Cuba, no part of its wretched

carnival floats creaking with lies, no part of Cuba at all, which [she] claims never possessed her" (73). Felicia, who learned the language of poetry from her mother, builds her own dream-world, borrowing "freely from the poems she'd heard, stringing words together like laundry on a line, connecting ideas and descriptions she couldn't have planned. The words sounded precisely right when she said them, though often people told her she didn't make sense at all" (110). Felicia's practical daughters do not share her flights of fancy, though her son Ivanito does. He plays word and color games with her: "'Let's speak in green' his mother says, and they talk about everything that makes them feel green" (84). Her daughter, Luz, judges that "this was just like her. Pretty words. Meaningless words that didn't nourish us, that didn't comfort us, that kept us prisoners in her alphabet world" (121).

When García entitles the last section of her book "The Languages Lost," she refers to much more than just Spanish, widening the reference to include the breaking of familial bonds between Cubans living on the island and those residing abroad.

The twins find a more authentic language in their burned father's disfigured face: "In his sagging eyes we found the language we'd been searching for, a language more eloquent than the cheap bead necklaces of words my mother offered" (124). Language also separates the twins from Ivanito, who decides "he will never speak his sisters' language, account for his movements like a cow with a dull bell" (86). Diverse idioms antagonize mothers and daughters, just as Cuba, "a country living on slogans and agitation" (107) alienates its exiles. Felicia's death leads Ivanito toward another language and land: "My mother never speaks to me, but sometimes . . . I pick up radio stations in Key West. I'm learning more English this way, but it's a lot different from Abuelo Jorge's grammar books. If I'm lucky, I can tune in the Wolfman Jack show on Sunday nights. Sometimes I want to be like the Wolfman and talk to a million people at once" (191).

Because of the loss of language, characters consistently turn to other, nontraditional forms of expression. Celia and her granddaughter communicate telepathically, in evening conversations that prove vital for both: "I hear her speaking to me at night just before I fall asleep. She tells me stories about her life and what the sea was like that day. She seems to know everything that's happened to me and tells me not to mind my mother too much. Abuela Celia says she wants to see me again. She tells me she loves me" (29). In Cuba, Celia "knows that Pilar keeps a diary in the lining of her winter coat, hidden from her mother's scouring eyes. In it, Pilar records everything. This pleases Celia. She closes her eyes and speaks to her granddaughter, imagines her words as slivers of light piercing the murky night" (7). Felicia turns to *santería* for insight into the real meaning of things, the ceremonies becoming "a kind of poetry that connected her to larger worlds, worlds alive and infinite" (186). Lourdes eats her way to obesity, converting food into the language of her grief as her father undergoes medical treatment. Thematically, Pilar's anxiety about losing the language of her culture is manifested through her obsession with painting and in her ruminations about visual texts (Alvarez-Borland, 46). Pilar finds that visual images communicate meaning much more effectively than words do: "Painting is its own language. . . . Translations just confuse it, dilute it, like words going from Spanish to English. I envy my mother her Spanish curses sometimes. They make my English collapse in a heap. . . . Who needs words when colors and lines conjure up their own language? That's what I want to do with my paintings, find a unique language, obliterate the clichés" (59, 139).

Pilar's obsession with language goes further than mere communication. She worries about the stories recorded, the versions of histories and truths hidden within the metaphors and constructedness of language. "If it were up to me," she says, "I'd record other things. Like the time there was a freak hailstorm in the Congo and the women took it as a sign that they should rule. Or the life stories of prostitutes in Bombay. Why don't I know anything about them? Who chooses what we should know or what's important? I know I have to decide these things for myself. Most of what I've learned that's important I've learned on my own, or from my grandmother" (28). She reflects on the consequences of increasing separation from her roots: "I resent the hell out of the politicians and the generals who force events on us that structure our lives, that dictate the memories we'll have when we're old. Every day Cuba fades a little more inside me, my grandmother fades a little more inside me. And there's only my imagination where our history should be" (38). Pilar's need to see behind the mask of language is part of her strategy of separation from her mother, who she feels never really told her anything important.

> This is a constant struggle around my mother, who systematically rewrites history to suit her views of the world. This reshaping of events happens in a dozen ways every day, contesting reality. It's not a matter of premeditated deception. Mom truly believes that her version of events is correct, down to details that I know, for a fact, are wrong. . . .
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> Mom's embellishments and half-truths usually equip her to tell a good story, though. And her English, her immigrant English, has a touch of otherness that makes it unintentionally precise. Maybe in the end the facts are not as important as the underlying truth she wants to convey. Telling her own truth is *the* truth to her, even if it's at the expense of chipping away our past. (176–77)

When García entitles the last section of her book "The Languages Lost," she therefore refers to much more than just Spanish, widening the reference to include the breaking of familial bonds between Cubans living on the island and those residing abroad. When they return, Pilar realizes, "The language [my mother] speaks is lost to them. It's another idiom entirely" (221). The novel's title, *Dreaming in Cuban*, suggests a rhetoric of belonging, a collective yet ever-imperfect antidote to isolation and estrangement (Vásquez, 23). Pilar, who begins to dream in Spanish, ultimately becomes embedded within a process of translation that involves a heightened appreciation of the shifting boundaries between language and meaning and the possibilities for the connection and the multiple self. Only then can she inscribe the book of women's stories, as she hovers between languages and belonging, challenging the fixed borders of relationships and loyalties.

The representation of Cuba as motherland becomes another important subtext in García's novel. The country is portrayed through both an insider and an outsider perspective, evocations tinged with the suffering of those who remain and the nostalgia of those who left and wish to return. All the central female characters are somehow exiled from Cuban reality: Celia lives defending an obsolete revolution, Felicia ignores it, Lourdes staunchly fights and deprecates communism, and Pilar idealizes the land her grandmother describes to her. Mary Vásquez argues that, for these four characters, Cuba is present fundamentally as a memory, disconnected from time. For Lourdes, Cuba is present only as an absence chosen and, hence, quite satisfactory: "Time with respect to Cuba has frozen in her perception of 1959: Cuba itself is immutable, lost, and deviant until Castro's fall, which must surely come, and when it does not, can only be delayed by the regime's lies and the people's blindness" (Vásquez, 22). Moreover, when she leaves Cuba, she insists on heading toward the cold, seeking a complete rupture from the heat of Cuba. New York is "cold enough," she proclaims (70), and she "relishes winter most of all — the cold scraping sounds on sidewalks and windshields, the ritual of scarves and gloves, hats and zip-in coat linings. Its layers protect her [from Cuba] . . . which Lourdes claims never possessed her" (73).

Pilar's search is ultimately for roots and connectedness, which she cannot achieve through her mother. Celia and Cuba become, therefore, the idealized objects of personal fulfillment and stability. As Pilar incorporates her grandmother's narrative, we become aware that both have lived for a time in the past, apprehending Cuba only through memory. As Vásquez explains, Celia "seeks to arrest the past and insert herself into it, with both she and the content of that past pristine and simultaneously changed and unchanged. . . . Pilar, on the other hand, practices the paradox of an anticipated, future and need. Of course, both are exercises of invention" (24).

In this vein, García uses the color blue as the primary motif for the representation of Cuba and its powerful link with the characters. "What I had in mind with the color blue is the mental image one has of an island," she explains in an interview. "Cuba is surrounded by water, and that's why there's so much blue in the book. Celia has a house on the beach, and so her entire horizon is blue. It colors her whole life and perspective" (Vorda, 70). Blue is the light that shines from Jorge del Pino's hospital room when he dies (19). He appears on the horizon as Celia stands guard, blue eyes "lasers in the night" and the beams "five hard blue shields" that bounce off his fingernails — a spectacular announcement of death (5). Celia, who "had lived all these years by the sea until she knew its every definition of blue" (7), understands that this is her husband's farewell. When Pilar begins to paint her grandmother, she foregrounds this color, blending the woman and the land: "Mostly, though, I paint her in blue. Until I returned to Cuba, I never realized how many blues exist. The aquamarines near the shoreline, the azures of deeper waters, the eggshell blues beneath my grandmother's eyes, the fragile indigos track- ing her hands. There's a blue, too, in the curves of the palms, and the edges of the words we speak, a blue tinge to the sand and the seashells and the plump gulls on the beach. The mole by Abuela's mouth is also blue, a vanishing blue" (233). Her painting will become another metafictional device that will freeze the experience of her Cuban visit and capture her grandmother's last moments.

The denouement of the novel centers on Lourdes and Pilar's journey back to Cuba. Lourdes returns to see her mother and sister again, to share her grief over Jorge's death. Pilar completes a long-deferred spiritual journey to recover her grandmother's dreams, as if to close a circle that began in the 1930s (Duany, 178-79). The latter must deal with an existential question of belonging, whose only response lies in the land of her past: "Even though I've been living in Brooklyn all my life, it doesn't feel like home to me. I'm not sure Cuba is, but I want to find out. If I could only see Abuela Celia again, I'd know where I belonged" (58). Mother and daughter will discern a central truth: that the old Cuba no longer exists, except in the imagination of both the exile and characters such as Celia, who remain loyal to the cause. Pilar realizes that "Cuba is a particular exile. . . . We can reach it by a thirty-minute charter flight from Miami, yet never reach it at all" (219). Still, the affinity with the land remains, making all the characters part of the network which has Cuba as the center that defines them and their relation to the other characters (Vásquez, 26). The realization that all of them are somehow exiles from Cuba permeates the end of the novel. Pilar's catharsis will be her awareness that, though she is captivated by Havana and treasures her grandmother, "sooner or later I'd have to return to New York. I know now it's where I belong — not *instead* of here, but *more* than here. How can I tell my grandmother this?" (36). Even Ivanito perceives the imperative: "I felt that I was meant to live in this colder world, a world that preserved history. In Cuba, everything seemed temporal, distorted by the sun" (146). Abandoning Cuba is imminent and necessary, through a return to the United States, defection, or death. Yet leaving the island, and Celia's walking into the ocean at the end of the narrative, frees Pilar, allowing her to appropriate the voices of the past and narrate personal and cultural histories.

One of Cristina García's central achievements in her inscription of the mother-daughter relationship lies in the manner in which she widens the sphere of this theme within the field of ethnic literature. In *Dreaming in Cuban* the author offers a new perspective on this struggle by further complicating the presentation of the maternal relationships in three ways. First, by analyzing three generations of women and the inclusion of sisters as vital constituents of the female group. Second, by contrasting mother-daughter relationships to those between mothers and sons and fathers and daughters. Finally, she chooses not to offer a more traditionally well-rounded ending to the central conflicts. At the end of the novel, Celia dies without her daughter coming to terms with her choices, and the relationship between Pilar and her mother remains problematic, though each has achieved insight into the other. Though other mother-daughter ethnic texts tend to favor the pattern of separation and later bonding, García chooses to undermine this, preferring instead to maintain her characters' ultimate disconnection. The process of reconciliation typical of mother-daughter ethnic novels is here presented, in the case of most of the characters, as incomplete. In this manner, García hints at the continuing process that moves beyond the text, and perhaps a progressive cyclical dialectic of entanglement.

The complicated mesh of relationships García untangles in *Dreaming in Cuban* has at its center the negotiation with the image of the maternal, in diverse ways. Each of the characters must delve into the implications of mothering, as well as belonging to a family and to a culture. The question of language and exile metaphorically dramatizes the mother-daughter relationships, deepening their implications and broadening possibilities for maternal discourse. Returning to the motherland, going back, gives Pilar the license to speak for the others and build her own future within the universe of maternal difference and connectedness, understood as the key to continuity. The concept of agency is at the heart of the narrative, the appropriation of the voice of mothers as exiles allowing the chronicle simultaneously to articulate and to signify. Cristina García turns to family, language, and motherland to develop and analyze sources of personal identity and creative expression, negotiating the between-world position and illustrating the process of self-identification. **WLT**

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