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Creative Muse:

The Young Female Artist and

The Role of Arts in Women's Künstlerromans

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Table of Contents

Abstract

This Master's thesis provides a comparative analysis of the portrayal of the woman artist in Willa Cather's *The Song of The Lark*, Cristina García's *Dreaming in Cuban* and Sandra Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street* to examine the importance of creativity and art-making processes in the development of a woman's positive self-identity —whether they are singers, painters or writers, as it is the case with the respective female protagonists.

Inspired by the authors' own journeys as novelists, the young protagonists of these künstlerromans explore their relationship with family and society and ask fundamental questions about gender and creativity, weaving the arts into everything they do. Thus, this thesis also interprets the implied dialogue of the authors with the young artist depicted in each novel in order to discover their views on creativity in both its aesthetic and feminist dimensions. As I try to show, it becomes clear that Cather, García and Cisneros discuss in their works the crisis between what is expected from women in light of factors such as gender and culture in opposition to how these artist-heroines choose to see themselves by putting forth an identity that is characterized by independence, autonomy, rebellion and determination —positive terms that describe certain remarkable continuities in the ways in which women writers present the female characters they relate to.

By thoroughly examining the above-mentioned issues through the lenses of cultural and literary theories, as well as through art and music psychology studies**,** this thesis also highlights the fact that the role of creativity and arts integration whether in the music, painting and/or literature fields have always been a powerful interdisciplinary

tool for women from various distinct social and cultural contexts to bridge reality with desired places, desired states of mind and accomplishments.

Keywords: arts integration, creativity, art-making processes, self-identity, making of an artist, künstlerroman, artist-heroine, literature, music, painting, feminism, hybridity, music psychology, *The Song of The Lark*, *Dreaming in Cuban*, *The House on Mango Street*.

Resumen

Este trabajo de fin de Máster presenta un análisis comparativo sobre la representación de la mujer artista en las novelas *The Song of The Lark* de Willa Cather, *Dreaming in Cuban* de Cristina García y *The House on Mango Street* de Sandra Cisneros, respectivamente, con el objetivo de evaluar la importancia que tienen la creatividad y los procesos artísticos—ya sean en literatura, pintura y/o música—en el desarrollo de la identidad propia de una mujer.

Basándose en la evolución de las propias autoras como novelistas, las protagonistas de estas künstlerromans exploran sus relaciones familiares y sociales y se plantean cuestiones esenciales sobre el género y la creatividad, entrelazando las artes en todo aquello que hacen. Por tanto, este trabajo también interpreta los diálogos implícitos entre las autoras y las jóvenes artistas de cada novela para descubrir su visión sobre la creatividad tanto en sus dimensiones estéticas como feministas. Se trata de demostrar así que Cather, García y Cisneros tratan en estas obras el conflicto entre lo que se espera de una mujer según factores culturales y de género en oposición a cómo éstas deciden

comportarse, defendiendo así una personalidad independiente, autónoma, rebelde y con determinación —términos que describen notables características en común entre las autoras y los personajes femeninos con los que se identifican.

Analizando en profundidad las cuestiones mencionadas a través de teorías culturales y literarias, así como de estudios de psicología musical y del arte, este trabajo destaca el hecho de que la creatividad y la integración de las diferentes artes en la música, la pintura y/o la literatura ha sido siempre una poderosa herramienta con la que mujeres de distintos contextos sociales y culturales han conectado la realidad con sus deseos, aspiraciones y logros.

Palabras clave: integración de artes, creatividad, procesos artísticos, identidad propia, creación de una artista, künstlerroman, artista-heroína, literatura, música, pintura, feminismo, personalidad híbrida, psicología musical y del arte, *The Song of The Lark*, *Dreaming in Cuban*, *The House on Mango Street*.

1. Introduction

This Master's thesis considers how the arts can facilitate the creation of a self-identity to the young female vocational artist and the ways in which women authors in particular have employed different art-making processes to reformulate stereotypical images in literature. Thus, by focusing on the themes of identity, creativity and inspiration, I explore the implicit link between Willa Cather's *The Song of The Lark* (1915), Cristina García's *Dreaming in Cuban* (1992) and Sandra Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street* (1984), and what is at stake in reading Thea, Pilar and Esperanza —the young female protagonists of these modern künstlerromans — as artists, whether they create original art or are involved in any creative activity themselves.

Drawing upon cultural and literary theories, as well as art research and psychology studies, this thesis posits that the Thea's, Pilar's and Esperanza's alternative "happily ever after" come through locating the vocation of artistic creativity in music, painting and literature, respectively, as the fulcrum for self-definition and social change. From this point of view, through their works, each author seems to provide concrete advice and concrete models of women who make art against limiting conditions in order to retain their independence, pursue their ambitions, and cultivate their sources of creativity. Therefore, this thesis also aims to prove that the feminist legacy of fictional artists can inspire other female artists, whatever their artistic field is, because the arts are an important affirmative, expressive medium for women in fiction as well as in real life.

Methodology

To achieve this goal I have organized my essay into four main chapters. The first chapter, "On Theoretical Framework," has three subsections. The first subchapter, "On Life and Art," is concerned with the importance of the arts as a tool for self-expression.

The second subchapter, "The Female Bildungsroman and künstlerroman," deals with the challenges of defining the female künstlerroman genre and its features within the three analyzed texts. In the third subchapter, "Transcultural Artists," I emphasize women artists' transgression of social and cultural boundaries despite their national origin, race, or ethnicity by focusing on the shared experience of migration as lived and portrayed by these authors (García and Cisneros in particular). The importance of these three subchapters relies on the fact that these aspects are reflected in the three works I have chosen for the analysis, and thus form the basis of this thesis' thematic choice. The following chapters of the thesis draw parallels between their portrayal of a female artist in the making in the chosen three novels. Chapter 3, Willa Cather's *The Song of the Lark*: "The Creative Power," analyzes Thea Kronborg's ambitions and struggles to create herself as a successful opera singer at the beginning of the twentieth century. Next, chapter 4: Cristina García's *Dreaming in Cuban*: "Obliterate The Clichés," refers to the personal and artistic revolution of Pilar Puente, an exiled Cuban adolescent who tries to find her place in both the alternative artistic sphere and America. Finally, chapter 5: Sandra Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street*: "For Those Who Cannot," deals with the awakening of young Esperanza, a Chicana writer living in a poor Latino neighborhood.

Moreover, this second part of the thesis suggests that, as I try to prove, these novels reflect a particular stage of the author's journey, her aesthetic and cultural views of that given period, and her preference for a specific type of art, proving that factors such as cultural and ethnic background or society in which they live do not actually make a considerable difference between their perception of the role of the woman artist.

Inspired by my own artistic journey,[1] I discuss these issues not only from an academic point of view but also from my own experiences as a vocational artist myself.

2. On Theoretical Framework

2.1. On Life and Art

Art is very important, not mere words, sounds or paintings, but as an expression of our inner being. Through emotion and context, art-making and creativity function as very distinctive mediums of meanings which often turn out to be rather difficult to be conveyed in words. Thus, the value of the creative process is certainly crucial to a woman's right to express herself in oppressive situations, whether personal or social. As we will see in this essay, with the help of the arts, Cather, García and Cisneros are capable of capturing the inner conflict and development of their respective female characters more delicately and effectively, allowing them to connect emotively and rouse emotion in themselves and the reader indeed. In fact, as Daniel Serig asserts:

> Artists use reflexivity to engage in a dynamic cycle of creating art to make meaning, to make sense of the world and their place in it. Influential life experiences are often the focus of reflexive thought because they are seen as having an impact on current artistic practices. But the art practice, while perhaps separated into specific time and location distinctions, interrelates with the life of the artist. In this way, the content of an artist's work involves these

[1] As I have devoted a considerable proportion of my life to art —to music and literature in particular—I find that art is not a mere ornament of my life nor a hobbie, as it goes further beyond that. Indeed, the interweaving of the arts is into everything I do, bringing me motivation, knowledge and a deeper understanding of life, aspects that I try to reflect in this thesis too.

> interrelationships as the artist dialogues with the self through the material. (236)

Similarly, visual artist Teresita Fernández (b.1968) claims that art "is always the combinatorial product of the fragments of who we are, of our combinatorial character," and, thus,

> Being an artist is not just about what happens when you are in the studio. The way you live, the people you choose to love and the way you love them, the way you vote, the words that come out of your mouth, the size of the world you make for yourselves, your ability to influence the things you believe in, your obsessions, your failures — *all* of these components will also become the raw material for the art you make. (qtd. in Popova)

As a result, art gives the heroine —as well as the author— the opportunity to consider herself in the world and describe and question each specific location. However, we might also notice that the protagonists of the künstlerromans analyzed in this thesis all want to create and make art especially whenever they feel lonely, misunderstood or rejected, which proves that art-making has also a lot to do with our human need to feel understood and to connect with others like us too. Curiously enough, that remarkable journey of creative awakening begins, however, when the heroine goes through a private record of introspection.[2] Such need makes comprehensible and thus endurable

[2] Cather's protagonist Thea Kronborg spends some days alone at a desert canyon to reconnect with her artistic purpose, García's Pilar Puente becomes more reflective when she travels to her hometown in Cuba, while Cisneros' poet-heroine Esperanza finds solitude and inspiration inside her small room in the house on Mango Street.

the most elusive, complex, and difficult experiences described in these novels, which are common not only to writers, not only to all artists, but to all human beings.

Consequently, this thesis explores these claims as they sometimes equally affect men and women, but gives especially detailed attention to their meaning in the lives of young women who are creative and have artistic ambition. Next, in the following section, I will discuss whether these three novels can be somehow linked with each other through the features of the künstlerroman genre that they contain.

2.2. The Female Bildungsroman and Künstlerroman

To begin with, I will briefly explore some of the theoretical context with regard to the female Bildungsroman and künstlerroman, before moving on to a more detailed comparative of the fictional texts. On the one hand, the Bildungsroman is often called "the novel of formation" or "novel of education" (in the broad sense of the word) because it shows the development of the protagonist's mind and character through a number of stages and a variety of experiences, often from childhood to early adulthood. On the other hand, the künstlerroman,[3] also called "the artist novel," represents the growth of either a writer or any other kind of artist, into maturity, and characteristics of the genre follow the formation of the artist almost as much as the art they strive to create. While some critics believe the boundary separating these two genres is virtually non-existent, or that the künstlerroman is only a "more specialized version" of the Bildungsroman (Saunders 13), there is, in fact, a dividing line which women have been prevented from crossing as artists in literature.

[3] Literally, *künstlerroman* translates to English as "artist" (from the German, "künstler") and "novel" (from the French, "roman").

As Elise Thornton states in her thesis on the *Representations of the Woman Artist in Modernist Literature*, the figure of the artist-hero has dominated literary narratives since the Romantic period (2).[4] As a result, much of Bildungsroman criticism throughout the twentieth century excludes female narratives from their studies,[5] and the Bildungsroman is often identified as a predominantly male genre. Moreover, Jerome Buckley devotes the majority of his study *Season of Youth* (1974) to Bildungsroman that were specifically written by men, and argues that the hero is usually introduced in the narrative as a "child of some sensibility" who is reared in the country where "he" discovers that "social and intellectual" restrictions have been "placed upon [his] free imagination" (17). However, with the development of the first wave of feminism, the artist-heroine begins to emerge in the literature of the twentieth century. Modernist women writers,[6] in particular, engage with the figure of the woman artist. As a result, their works begin to cover issues surrounding gender and artistry/creativity, which marked the shift from the traditional female Bildungsroman narrative—which typically

[4] Novels like Stendhal's *Le Rouge et le Noir* (*The Red and the Black*) (1830), Thomas Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* (1831), Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield* (1850) and *Great Expectations* (1861), Gustave Flaubert's *L'Éducation Sentimentale* (*Sentimental Education*) (1869), Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* (1895), Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* (1913), or Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916) are usually recognized as the leading examples of nineteenth and twentieth-century Bildungsroman.

[5] For example, Maurice Beebe in *Ivory Towers and Sacred Founts: The Artist as Hero in Fiction from Goethe to Joyce* (1964) concentrates on künstlerroman as well as short stories dealing with the artist by Goethe, Mann, Balzac, Flaubert, James, Lawrence, Joyce and a number of other male authors only.

[6] Such as Virginia Woolf, Dorothy Richardson, May Sinclair, Vita Sackville-West, Kate Chopin or Willa Cather, to name some.

ends in marriage[7]—to the künstlerroman, where female protagonists are depicted as determined vocational artists. Once again, Thornton further defends that,

> The question of whether the female protagonists in these novels are read as developing artists is not a mere issue of taxonomy: it is about women's autonomy, education, professionalization, and their right to individual self-expression as artists. [...] These definitions have historically excluded women and by extension limited the kind of artistry they are seen to engage in. [...] Furthermore, [female künstlerromans] examine and reinterpret the necessary conditions needed to achieve artistic fulfillment. (2)

However, the patriarchal mantra proclaiming "women can't paint, women can't write" (48) imposed upon Virginia Woolf's artist-protagonist Lily Briscoe in *To the Lighthouse* (1927), certainly represents an enduring obstacle for the woman artist at that time This continues until the second-wave of the feminist movement during the 1970s and 80s, when critics who were concerned with the "excavation of and recovery of lost women writers and artists" (Elliot and Wallace 14), finally began to recognize a previously neglected female presence in the genre.[8] Consequently, according to Thornton (2013),

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[7] For example, Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* (1869), or Charlotte Brönte's *Jane Eyre* (1847).

[8] One such publication that reasserts the genre's influence and continued strength in literature is Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's groundbreaking publication *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (1979), which happens to be the first critical study to offer a more comprehensive examination of the female Bildungsroman.

> While the figure of the woman artist had been previously ignored by critics as a significant literary figure, had been identified as an amateur to her male counterpart, or was simply given just the role of the male artist's muse, [...] the modernist examination of this figure instigated new trends in how we explore gender, women's creativity and national identity within literary studies today. (269)

Another key element of women artists' resistance to the masculine ideology surrounding art has been the literary representation, often autobiographical, of the female artist-heroine. These narratives have been repeatedly misclassified as Bildungsromans in literary criticism, yet they explore the creative process rather than just the artistic production because the protagonist's symbolic journey as a woman and as an artist is important for her coming of age, as well as her looking for answers to her questions and solutions to her problems. Thus, the question of whether the protagonists in these novels are read as developing artists in the künstlerroman tradition cuts to the heart of questions of feminism and female creativity. Moreover, because "the figure of the female artist encodes the conflict between any empowered woman and the barriers to her achievement" (DuPlessis 84), these authors want to reach the same goal: they want the freedom for their heroines to create their own identities, a step towards "a conscious rupture with all oppressive traditions of all cultures" (Anzaldúa 104).

Therefore, reading Willa Cather's *The Song of The Lark*, Cristina García's *Dreaming in Cuban* and Sandra Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street* as künstlerromans rather than Bildungsromans will allow us to explore the ways in which these authors's works examine female creativity and challenge any oppressive attitudes surrounding the role of the woman artist.

2.3. Transcultural Artists

Furthermore, the three protagonists of the works I analyze forge their identity from various distinct linguistic and cultural contexts. Thus, the process of becoming is marked by their hybrid identities, which ultimately represent the journeys of their respective authors. Although the theory and criticism of the literature of migration and diaspora tend to focus only on the author's ethnicity or national origin, the protagonists' experiences, their loneliness, their growth, their identity crises, and feelings of frustration at feeling misunderstood at the same time they feel they do not belong anywhere are all themes that transcend cultural borders.[9]

At the same time, these novels, especially García's *Dreaming in Cuban* and Cisnero's *The House on Mango Street*, are examples of literature's "critical globalization," wherein the narrative "uses knowledge of other regions or countries to disrupt habitual perceptions and practices, and to prompt a self-reflexive repositioning of the self in the global sphere" (Cuddy-Keane 546). Both authors show that out of their dislocations, their restless movement from one place to another and their constant commuting between cultures, often emerge tensions, contradictions, and reconfigurations that shape and influence the artistic production of the young female artist[10]. She also might struggle sometimes with feelings of isolation and dislocation, yet she can be sure, at least, that the journey to become an artist will take her somewhere, and she will certainly be changed. All these issues, however, stress the importance of

[9] Thus, according to Maurizio Ascari, "contemporary literature is a primary tool in the effort to foster intercultural understanding, a representation of human experience" (17).

[10] This also occurs in Cather's *The Song of Lark* when Thea Kronborg travels from Chicago to a desert canyon to find her artistic self (see section 3.4. "Thea's Awakening to Art" in chapter 2, page 25).

having different positive role models of female artists in literature. Thus, it is no wonder that author Amy Ling stresses:

> How much we share as a community of women and how often our commonalities cross cultural and racial barriers, [through] reading Barolini, [...] Alice Walker's "In Search of our Mothers' Gardens" and *The Color Purple*, Audre Lorde's poems and essays, and Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own,* is like finding sisters I didn't know I had. (154)

Therefore, in what follows, I will take a closer look at the story and development of each artist-heroine to prove that Cather, García and Cisneros' works serve as examples of modern American tradition of the künstlerroman genre, challenging some themes of the traditional concept and enriching the genre with new views and voices.

3. Willa Cather's *The Song of the Lark*: "The Creative Power"

3.1. Willa Cather's Aesthetics Theories in *The Song of the Lark*

Although Willa Cather (1873-1947)[11] was not a musician herself, music inspired both her life and her work as a writer. In fact, at least twenty-one of her short stories and all twelve of her novels involve musicians and/or music, either directly or indirectly. Cather's most positive view of art and the artist's life is found, however, in *The Song of the Lark* (1915),[12] a novel which has always been considered a künstlerroman,[13] since it

[11] See Appendix 1. Figure 1, page 58.

[12] See Appendix 1. Figure 2, page 58.

depicts the development of an artist in the growth of Thea Kronborg from a young girl who loves music to a mature artist who embodies art through opera singing and overcomes her own struggles to reach her musical ambitions —much like Cather's own growth from a young girl who enjoyed literature to an acclaimed author for whom creating literature was central.[14]

Furthermore, *The Song of the Lark* was a very personal book for Cather, and it is actually considered the most autobiographical fiction she ever wrote (Woodress 266). Generally, the novel is said to be based on two models. On the one hand, Willa Cather tells the story of Thea Kronborg from her own memories and experiences, incorporating into the story of the heroine's life the concepts, images, metaphors, ways of speaking and self-narratives that are used in constructing a sense of self-identity in relation to music. On the other, Olive Fremstad (1871-1951),[15] the Swedish-born opera singer from Minnesota, became to a certain extent Cather's model for Thea Kronborg, embodying all the attributes Cather looked for in an artist.[16]According to James Woodress, of great importance to Cather was also the fact that "she had been observing artists for twenty years, and [therefore] her understanding of the artistic temperament came out of long experience" (167). Indeed, she says in the novel —through the character of Theodore Thomas, conductor of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra— that her admiration of women singers was not just about

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[13] David Stouck was the first critic to call *The Song of the Lark* a *künstlerroman* in *Willa Cather's Imagination* (1975).

[14] Although this is neither a psychological nor a biographical study of Willa Cather, it should be said that her fiction as well as her aesthetic theories have autobiographical implications.

[15] See Appendix 1. Figure 3, page 59.

[16] Richard Giannone states that Fremstad embodied Cather's "artist *par excellence*" not only because of her outstanding vocal qualities, "the beauty and the intelligence of her singing," but also because of "the force behind the instrument" that Cather "so deeply admired" (83-84).

> Voice and execution alone. There was a greatness about them. They were great women, great artists. They opened a new world to me. [...] [At a young age,] such influences are actually creative. I always think of my artistic consciousness as beginning then. (Cather 187-88)

Cather's aesthetic theories, thus, stem from her personal experience. However, due to the fact that the art of literature was her primary field of interest, Cather expressed her aesthetic theories in relation to this kind of art first. Yet, as Edith Lewis points out, the extent to which "musical forms influenced [Cather's] composition, and how her style, her beauty of cadence and rhythm, were the results of a sort of transposed musical feeling" (48).

Furthermore, Richard Giannone suggests in his study *Music in Willa Cather's Fiction* that music for Cather was "the pre-eminent art, the condition toward which other significant [artistic] forms aspire" (6). As she devoted a considerable proportion of her interest to art,[17] and to music and musicians in particular, it becomes evident that music was not for her just "an intellectual interest" but rather "an emotional experience" which produced a special connection between her thoughts and feelings (Lewis 47). In particular, Veronika Slováčková claims that Cather's preferred kind of performance was singing, because "in the act of singing the human body naturally comes into direct contact with the passions and power of art" (32-33). In other words, music for Cather did not mean merely the beautiful sounds in the literal sense of music, but she insisted

[17] The extent to which Willa Cather was also interested in and influenced by painting has been thoroughly documented by Polly P. Duryea in her 1993 dissertation *Paintings and Drawings in Willa Cather's Prose: A Catalogue Raisonne.*

that "music is to be found in all art" as some kind of "appeal" or "expressed passion" (qtd. in Giannone 6). She asserted indeed that art, generally, was for her

> Not thought or emotion, but expression, expression, always expression. To keep an idea living, intact, [...] to keep it so all the way from the brain to the hand and transfer it on paper a living thing with color, odor, sound, life all in it, that is what art means. (qtd. in Slote 76)

Interestingly enough, Slote affirms that Cather "changed 'Art for Art's Sake' to Art for Life's Sake'" (32), meaning that the artist does not create for the sake of art but more importantly, for the sake of life and the people to whom a piece of art is addressed. In this thread of thought, in the preface to the 1932 edition of the book, she wrote that,

> The title [*The Song of the Lark*] was meant to suggest a young girl's awakening to something beautiful. [...] [Thea's] artistic life is the only one in which she is happy, or free, or even very real. [...] What I cared about, and still care about, was the girl's escape. ("Preface")

Set from 1885 to 1909, *The Song of the Lark* details the life of Thea Kronborg as she moves from a suffocating and small town in Colorado, to Chicago and New York, where twenty years later she has become a famous opera singer who sings at the Metropolitan Opera House. However, this novel is less a tale of Thea Kronborg's career development as an opera diva than a coming of age story which details how a young girl both discovers and fully realizes her creative potential, rendering her journey of self-discovery and artistic growth. Indeed, the author claims that,

> The growth of an artist is an intellectual and spiritual development which can scarcely be followed in a personal narrative. This story attempts to deal only with the simple and concrete beginnings which color and accent an artist's work. (Cather 397)

At the same time, through *The Song of The Lark* Cather thus shows that music is not just a genuine source of inspiration for young musicians but it can also be a force that writers use in their own literature to re-create stories.

3.2. Thea Kronborg

According to Marion Fay, Cather's fiction often involves women "who are pioneers or immigrants of sorts too, and who departing from traditional lives of home and family,[18] become musicians or perform music." Such women, Fay suggests, are presented as being "displaced and conflicted yet driven by a desire to transcend their lives and circumstances" (37). Thea, who is the daughter of Swedish immigrants living in Colorado, certainly falls under this description —and the protagonists of both García's *Dreaming in Cuban* and Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street* as well, as we will see in the next chapters. Thea's life is hard but not unhappy, yet right from the beginning, she is perceived as different from the other townspeople of Moonstone, and even Thea herself thinks that there is "something very different about her" (Cather 9). While her parents recognize and respect their daughter's talent as a musician — especially her mother, who seems to be a greater force in Thea's life and who, realizing

[18] Veronika Slováčková also points out that it is in her early works that Cather considers "the life of a woman incompatible with the life of an artist" since the social expectations of females in the nineteenth century America included total commitment to the family and household duties (51).

that she has an unusual talent, encourages her to pursue her goals— her siblings and neighbors think of Thea as spoiled and rebellious, thus she feels misunderstood and out of place. Nonetheless, according to Susan O'Neill, "the high cultural value we place on music is associated with its capacity to transcend the "normal" mundane experiences of our everyday lives" (93), and especially for young musicians like Thea, it has the ability to construct another reality as well. In this sense, Thea also finds refuge from the world in a tiny room in the high-windowed gable of the attic, a rose-papered bower where she can read, write, and dream in peace. Cather suggests that,

> The acquisition of this room [...] was one of the most important things that ever happened to her. [...] From the time when she moved up into the wing, Thea began to live a double life. During the day, when the hours were full of tasks, she was one of the Kronborg children, but at night she was a different person. (Cather 52-53)

Cather also notes that it was on such nights that Thea "learned the thing that old Dumas[19] meant when he told the Romanticists that to make a drama he needed but one passion and four walls" (Cather 127). Thus, throughout the story we can see Thea's internal battle to discover her own identity, and how she comes to know herself better precisely in those moments of isolation. Moreover, it is also

[19] Cather considered this statement as one of the elementary principles that guided her own output as an artist. In context, French author Alexandre Dumas (1802-1870) was comparing his own drama method with that of Victor Hugo: "Hugo was lyric and theatrical; I was dramatic. Hugo required for his effects the introduction of organ music and chorus, of tables covered with flowers and black draped coffins. He needed elaborate scenery, costumes, stage effects, secret doors and stairs, rope ladders and traps. I needed only four walls, four boards, two actors and one passion." Available at http://johnbakersblog.co.uk/four-walls-and-one-passion/

important to point out that Willa Cather actually wrote this over ten years before Virginia Woolf said that, "a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction" (Woolf 4).

Soon Thea's vocal gift is also detected and encouraged by her piano teacher, Herr Wunsch, who thinks Thea "is uncommon, in a common, common world" (Cather 193). He also thinks, however, that "[a]ll the intelligence and talent in the world can't make a singer" (Cather 186), yet Thea has not only talent but also "imagination and a stubborn will, curiously balancing and interpenetrating each other" (Cather 88). In fact, as O' Neill points out,

> Although there is no agreed definition of what constitutes a musician, contemporary theorists [...] agree on the need for the term to encompass more than the ability to demonstrate performance skills. This distinction is particularly prominent and influential in childhood and adolescence. (79)

Richard Giannone identifies the above mentioned qualities necessary for an artist in order to become excellent with Thea's "creative passion," which she can "unlock" only by her "true medium," her voice (90). However, at this point Thea, even though she has always wanted to be an artist "more than anything else in the world" , does not know yet what she can do to release the talent inside her, and thinks her horizons are very limited indeed (Cather 190). Thus, after an argument with her sister, she leaves her home not to return to her family "'till I've got something to show for myself," she says (258). The truth is that Thea's artistic spirit will remain unawoken until she starts to study music in Chicago.

3.3. Artistic Influences in *The Song of the Lark*

When Thea leaves home to study in Chicago, she remains oblivious to the city itself. The only thing that grips her imagination while in the city, however, is a painting by French artist Jules Breton called *The Song of the Lark* that she sees in the Art Museum.[20]The painting depicts a peasant girl standing in a field, listening to a lark, while the sun is rising. Cather conveys a verbal image of such an inspiring experience for Thea in an ekphrastic[21] passage which represents in words the details of the painting and the influence of Breton's barefooted peasant on the young country girl:

> That was her picture. She imagined that nobody cared for it but herself, and that it waited for her. [...] She liked even the name of it, 'The Song of the Lark.' The flat country, the early morning light, the wet fields, the look in the girl's heavy face —well, they were all hers, anyhow, whatever was there. She told herself that that picture was 'right.' Just what she meant by this, it would take a clever person to explain. But to her the word covered the almost boundless satisfaction she felt when she looked at the picture. (179)

This marks the beginning of Thea's genuine quest for creative expression. From that moment on, she understands what she wants, and she becomes determined that "as long as she lived, that ecstasy was going to be hers. She would live for it, work for it, die for it; but she was going to have it, time after time, height after height" (183). However, since she had always aimed at getting all her goals —because "Living is too

[20] See Appendix 1. Figure 5, page 60.

[21] Ekphrasis is the description of a work of art, such as a painting, a melody or a sculpture, in a literary passage. Definition available in https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ekphrasis

much trouble unless one can get something big out of it"— Thea still wants "only impossible things" (219) and rejects the idea of conforming. Thus, when her new piano instructor, Andor Harsanyi, encourages her to study opera, Thea realizes that singing is really her true vocation, because

> Her voice, more than any other part of her, had to do with that confidence, that sense of wholeness and inner well-being that she had felt at moments ever since she could remember. (Cather 21-22)

Consequently, Thea is neither forceful or dominant, but rather focused and determined, especially after Harsanyi reminds her that,

> Nothing is far and nothing is near, if one desires. The world is little, people are little, human life is little. There is only one big thing — desire. And before it, when it is big, all is little. (69)

Nevertheless, in *The Song of the Lark*, Willa Cather not only portrays the gift and power of art, but also the pain and isolation it might bring to the artist whose strongest need is "to find herself, to emerge as herself" through art, or more specifically, through singing (190). Besides, Cather emphasizes that, "only the artist, the great artist, knows how difficult [artistic growth] is" (409). Music is about becoming better with hard work and discipline, and the isolation that being a professional singer requires slowly takes away Thea's energy, until she feels exhausted and depressed from what she considers her "fight" (222). The "battle" or "fight" metaphors serve here to emphasize the musicians' experience of anxiety by relating the term to negative connotations and implications of the concept, such as control, power, tension, and conflict. However, Thea also thinks that,

> When what one really strives for in art is not the sort of thing you are likely to find when you drop in for a performance at the opera. What one strives for is so far away, so deep, so beautiful... (Cather 395)

Nevertheless, it is not until her friend and former lover Fred Ottenburg sends Thea off to Panther Canyon, Arizona, where she is able to rest and recuperate, that she discovers the nature of her gift and believes in it enough to invest in study abroad — which will lead to her eventual success.

3.4. Thea's Awakening to Art

Thea's full artistic awakening takes place when she surrenders to absolute solitude in the desert, where she finds a space to blossom and frees herself from the tiring personality that burdened her in Chicago. In addition, the awe Thea discovers in exploring the desert will have a great impact on her artistic direction. Such a powerful experience in Panther Canyon[22] rewires Thea emotionally and intellectually because, as the reader is told, "she was getting back to the earliest sources of gladness that she could remember" (266). Cather gives a lyrical explanation[23] of what is taking place in Thea's mind at this crucial point in her life:

> The stream and the broken pottery: what was any art but an effort to make a sheath, a mold in which to imprison for a moment the shining, elusive element that is life itself – life hurrying past us and running away […]. In

[22] See Appendix 1. Figure 4, page 59.

[23] In the critical edition of *The Song of the Lark*, Ann Moseley highlights that such writing makes this novel "an early modernist episode," since James Joyce's *The Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man*, which describes a similar artistic transformation of his protagonist, was published the following year, in 1916 (2012).

> singing, one made a vessel of one's throat and nostrils and held it on one's breath, caught the stream in a scale of natural intervals. (273)

This whole experience reinforces an even more important revelation later in Thea's life, when listening to Dvorák's *New World Symphony*,[24] the music reveals to her the existing link between the landscape in her memory and the musician she wants to become —by implication, the music speaks of alienation and loss and of the eagerness felt by people starting over, just like Thea. It is clear, then, that when Thea arrived in the canyon she was in need to make a decision about her singing career, but Panther Canyon was her "creative hour" (397), the moment when her art got a sense of direction. At this point in the novel, she is prepared and determined to serve art selflessly and absolutely. Thus, she decides to start her studies anew in Germany and try to succeed this time, feeling that "she was going away to fight, and she was going away forever" (222).

3.5. Thea's Show Must Go On

The mature Thea Kronborg we meet in the novel's last section is ten years older than the young woman who came of age in Panther Canyon —she is now indeed "much older" and "much harder," but still "only 20 years old," as Cather points out (222). Thea, who has gradually gained recognition in the world of music because she subordinated

[24] Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904), considered the greatest Czech and Romantic composer of all time, is known for creating some of the most beautiful symphonies in the history of music. A style which is often known as romantic-classicist synthesis, his wide range of works includes symphonies, choral music, chamber music, operas and concerts. Available at https://www.britannica.com/biography/Antonin-Dvorak/

her life to art[25] —"Your work becomes your personal life. You are not much good until it does," she tells herself (392)— is now a successful soprano at the Metropolitan Opera. This means that she has finally found her artistic passion or, as Harsanyi once told Thea,

> Your gift, and the woman you were meant to be. When you find your way to that gift and to that woman, you will be at peace. In the beginning it was an artist that you wanted to be; well, you may be an artist, always. (191)

Conclusively, in *The Song of the Lark* Willa Cather renders the story of a young woman attempting to achieve a professional career as a musician through an understanding and truthful portrayal of the struggle necessary to such accomplishments and the devotion to one's art. However, Cather not only makes clear that fulfilling the dreams of artistic creation requires great talent and determination to be found only in those capable of total commitment to their vocation, but also that, "to persons of [Thea's] vitality and honesty, fortunate accidents always happen" ("Preface"), which makes this novel a beautiful and thoughtful statement about all those "hungry boys and girls [...] who possess the treasure of creative power" (237).

[25] Performance artist Marina Abramović (b.1946) states in *33 Artists in 3 Acts* (Thornton 2014) that, in her view, "Great artists result from the sacrifices that you make to your personal life" (19).

4. Cristina García's *Dreaming in Cuban*: "Obliterate The Clichés"

4.1. On Cristina García and *Dreaming in Cuban*

Cristina García,[26] who was born in Cuba in 1958 but emigrated to the United States with her parents during the first wave of Cuban emigration after Fidel Castro came to power in 1960, is the first Cuban-America woman ever to publish a novel written in English, the groundbreaking *Dreaming in Cuban* (1992).[27] The publication of *Dreaming in Cuban* brought Cristina García acclaim and a nomination for the National Book Award, and since then on she has been considered one of the most important and provocative Cuban-American voices in literature. In an interview with Scott Brown, García cites Wallace Stevens, Federico García Lorca, Octavio Paz, Pablo Neruda, Gabriel García Márquez, and William Carlos Williams as particular literary inspirations for her when writing this novel (254), which contributed to its lyricism.[28] Perhaps her greatest inspiration was, however, a trip back to Cuba in 1984, where she learned about her broken family and, as for so many bicultural writers, regained a sense of her own culture of origin and discovered her Latin American literary heritage. That trip pushed her to face new and unsettling questions because, as she claims,

> The sense of not fitting in either Havana, or in Miami, the heart of the Cuban exile community, made me start questioning my own

[26] See Appendix 2. Figure 1, page 61.

[27] See Appendix 2. Figure 2, page 61.

[28] Referring to her first novel, Cristina García claims: "I often thought of the book in musical terms. For me, I fuelled this by reading a lot of poetry and paying attention to the musicality of each sentence. I also wanted to capture in English something of the rhythm and syncopation of the Spanish language" (Brown 254).

> identity. Where did I belong? What did it mean to be Cuban? And the poetry made me feverish to write. (Brown 249)

Consequently, in *Dreaming in Cuban*, García beautifully and poignantly describes three generations of a family's life who struggle both in Cuba and the United States, while critically exploring Cuba's political situation. Nonetheless, *Dreaming in Cuban* is much more than a commentary on the political situation of Cuba in the late twentieth century. The novel intertwines the political and the personal, and tackles themes of family, politics, and memory, in order to offer a sound reflection upon other aspects of the human condition that are of a more universal nature. For instance, the novel portrays the idea that art is one of the most important factors that help us shape our identity and express ourselves through creativity. *Dreaming in Cuban* is, therefore, the portrait of rebellious aspiring artist Pilar Puente, which transforms the story into a female künstlerroman. This way, Pilar's development of her hybrid identity is central to the novel's theme, as we follow her physical, mental, emotional, and artistic journey as a young woman and a would-be artist.

4.2. Pilar Puente

García creates Pilar's character loosely based on some of her own personal experiences growing up as a Cuban-American adolescent in New York. She has actually said that Pilar is the character she identifies with the most, acting as a kind of "an alter ego" for her, because,

> I grew up with a very bifurcated sense of myself. At home, things were intensely Cuban. In the rest of my life, it had very little meaning. I probably thought of myself, first and foremost, as a

> New Yorker —an urban kid with an affinity for many cultures yet beholden to none. (Brown 251)

Curiously enough, Pilar's last name "Puente" means in English "bridge," which suggests that the author might have consciously chosen Pilar's last name because in order for her to fully develop her identity, she must first bridge her Cuban heritage with her American life. Thus, as Jon Scheneiderman points out in his analysis of the novel, García's portrayal of Pilar "not only attempts to describe the difficulties of a hybrid existence,[29] but also to bridge two different cultures" (7). It is clear, then, that García is using the character of Pilar to represent García's generation of immigrants who have struggled to create an identity because they were born in Cuba but raised and educated in the United States.

4.3. Pilar Speaks Through Writing

The reader is first introduced to young Pilar Puente early in the novel, when her grandmother Celia del Pino remembers Pilar's letters sent from New York. Having grown-up in America, Pilar writes to her from Brooklyn "in a Spanish that is no longer hers," not that of a native speaker anymore, but awkward and "hard-edged" (García 7). However, Pilar and her grandmother share writing as a common bond, because they both record their experiences, history, and feelings in letters and diaries, which in the

[29] It seems necessary to first analyze what a "typical hybrid identity" is or should be. To begin with, Wolfgang Welsch states that "every culture is supposed to mould the whole life of the people concerned and of its individuals" (195). Yet there are two main conflicts to this. On the one hand, while most people are principally aware of one culture, one setting and one home, a person who migrates adopts characteristics of that new language and new culture, which combined with the old ones create a new hybrid identity. On the other hand, if "our identities are indeed hybrid," it becomes "increasingly difficult to describe something as entirely foreign or entirely our own" (Welsch 200).

author's words, "provide a window into [their] inner life and yearnings" (Brown 252). Thus, as a writer, García demonstrates that the inter-weaving of language can serve as a useful tool for artistic expression too. Nevertheless, when spoken and written languages seem to fail Pilar, this situation causes even more confusion in the creation of her own identity. She then wishes to have a new language to express herself —one that she eventually finds in art.

4.4. Pilar Feels Through Painting

From the beginning, we detect how Pilar is always attentive to the colors and shapes that surround her and for which she displays a special sensibility that already announces her interest in painting and her artistic inclinations. Pilar is also constantly trying to express her own ideas, to express herself, and when both English and Spanish languages seem to fail her, she uses painting instead. Just as in James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* we detect the young man's interest in words, their association, meaning and sound, in *Dreaming in Cuban* colors and sounds are specially relevant throughout. When Pilar paints, the barriers of language and words are removed, and she can express what she feels through her art. She even comes to the conclusion that, "painting is its own language. Translations just confuse it, dilute it, like words going from Spanish to English" (García 59). Therefore, Pilar wonders, "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" (García 139). The one thing that is certain in Pilar's life is her driving desire to establish herself as an artist because art is important and liberating to her, and it helps her understand herself. For example, she shares with the reader that she feels "more comfortable" with abstract painting because "it's more directly connected to [her] emotions" (García 233), and at the same time she acknowledges "people here [in New York] react negatively to any

overt displays of soulfulness" (García 180). However, she also mentions at one point that her paintings "have been getting more and more abstract lately, violent-looking with clotted swirls of red" (García 29), which according to Scheneiderman, is reminiscent of Ana Mendieta,[30] a Cuban artist[31] that, as Coco Fusco[32] highlights, "was among the first exiles to renew bonds with her homeland and express in her art the pain of rupture that is so much a part of Cuban history" (Scheneiderman 25). If art is representative of the artist's sense of self, Pilar's art is certainly representative of her fragmented identity, and demonstrates the internal struggles she faces.

Furthermore, it is important to note that Pilar's formative years occur during the 1970s, when social movements in U.S. such as the Women's Rights movement sought to open the system up for women's participation at a public, political level. However, Frances Borzello states in *A World of Our Own: Women as Artists* that controlling who has access to proper education and training is one way of preventing women from attaining the same artistic status as men (142). Before the feminist movement arouse, actually, admission into art schools was a major step forward for the aspiring woman artist. Nonetheless, as Whitney Chadwick says, sexism towards women's art still prevailed in the community for "hierarchie[s] of genres" and culturally conditioned

[30] Ana Mendieta (Havana 1948–New York 1985) was an artist who explored her identity as a female emigrant in a work that mixed together performance, photography, film, and sculpture. Born in Cuba, in 1961 she was exiled to the United States and sent to an orphanage at the age of twelve. The trauma of separation from her family, culture, and homeland became the bedrock of her artistic work. Mendieta is often connected with the Feminist art movement for her work on the fluidity of gender to blur the line between male/female identification. Available at https://www.artsy.net/artist/ana-mendieta/

[31] See Appendix 2. Figure 3, page 62.

[32] Coco Fusco (b. 1960), Cuban-American New York-based interdisciplinary artist, writer, and feminist theorist. In her different works and artistic productions, Fusco has explored the politics of gender, race, war, and identity. Available at https://www.artsy.net/artist/coco-fusco/

stereotypes about women's creativity and role in the public sphere hindered their recognition as artists (38). Thus, when Pilar contemplates history and the role women play in it, her observations expose her frustration at the patriarchal treatment of women in history and of female artists in particular:

> I think about all the women artists throughout history who managed to paint despite the odds against them.[33] People still ask where all the important women painters are instead of looking at what they did paint and trying to understand their circumstances. Even supposedly knowledgeable and sensitive people react to good art by a woman as if it were an anomaly, a product of a freak of nature, or a direct result of her association with a male painter or mentor. Nobody's even heard of feminism in art school. The male teachers and students still call the shots and get the serious attention and fellowships that further their careers. As for the women, we're supposed to make extra money modelling nude. What kind of bullshit revolution is that? (García 139-40)

As a consequence, Pilar's development of her own identity as a hybrid member of society might be further complicated in light of her feminist views, which conflict with her traditionally patriarchal Cuban heritage. However, it is precisely Pilar's Cuban grandmother who encourages her as an artist that definitely strengthens their relationship — just like Esperanza bonds with her mother and the women around her

[33] Women painters, for example, were denied membership to national art academies like the British Royal Academy 1861, and to the École des Beaux-Arts until 1897, and were forced to adapt and find alternative "routes to professionalism" with private lessons and 40 group workshops, or ateliers, in an established male artist's studio (Borzello 130).

through writing in Sandra Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street*, as we will see in the next chapter. As a result, Pilar claims that she feels "much more connected to Abuela Celia than to Mom. Even in silence she gives me the confidence to do what I believe is right, to trust my own perceptions" (García 176). Even more, Pilar's identification with her grandmother stems not only from a close personal tie to her, but it also reflects a strong personal bond with her native Cuban culture.

In contrast, however, Pilar and her mother, Lourdes Puente, are divided by a lack of understanding because their personalities are polar opposites: on the one side, Pilar, as an artist, open-minded and optimistic; on the other side, Lourdes, whose views "are strictly black-and-white" (García 26), admits that she "has no patience for dreamers, for people who live between black and white" (García 129). Moreover, Pilar's mother also believes that everything is what it appears to be, tends to be pessimistic, and refuses the idea of change. Above all, one of the major differences between Pilar and Lourdes is, according to Rocio Davis, that "Pilar is a dreamer trying to construct her identity, while her mother is firmly accepting of her newfound identity as an immigrant in a new land" (64). It is no wonder then that mother and daughter strongly disagree on exile politics too, and this continuing struggle between them can be examined on a metaphorical level too. The author seems to establish a parallel between patriotism and motherhood, which is exemplified in Pilar's art. For example, when Lourdes commissions Pilar to do a large painting for the opening of her own bakery — even though at first she did not approve of her daughter's desire to become an artist— Pilar paints a punk Statue of Liberty, complete with "a safety pin through Liberty's nose" and written at the base, "her favorite punk rallying cry: I'M A MESS" (García 141). Pilar's painting, entitled "SL—76," seems to be not only a bold statement against the United States, but a rebellious one against her mother too. Since the knowledge of cultural symbols "instinctively

transform during art making processes into personal expressions of identity" (Marshall 7), Pilar's art thus demonstrates the internal struggles she is facing to blend her two worlds: her "hibridity" is part of who she is, of how she views the world, and consequently, of how she makes art.

4.5. Pilar Thinks Through Music

In *Dreaming in Cuban*, Pilar's taste in music also reflects her "hybridity" as well as her sense of marginalization from the dominant American society. As a self-described "punk," Pilar listens to Lou Reed,[34] Iggy Pop[35] and the Ramones,[36] the most relevant musicians and key figures in New York's punk scene in the mid-to-late 1970s. Pilar openly explains what attracts her to their music and she states:

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[34] Lou Reed (1942—2013), singer, songwriter, and guitarist. In 1965 he co-founded The Velvet Underground, a rock band managed by Andy Warhol. The band's first album, *The Velvet Underground & Nico* (1965), is considered one of the most influential in rock history. In 1972, Reed released *Transformer*, the album that contains "Walk on the Wild Side," a song in which he paid tribute to the hustlers and transvestites he had met at Warhol's Factory. Available at https://www.biography.com/people/lou-reed-9453959/

[35] Iggy Pop (b. 1947), singer, songwriter, and musician. Considered by many to be one of the pioneers of punk music, he formed the Stooges in 1967. Their music was experimental and had an aggressive quality to it. After the band was dropped by its record label, David Bowie helped Pop rebuilt the Stooges and acted as a producer on the group's third album, *Raw Power* (1973). Although their records sold poorly upon release, they have become rock classics and can be pointed to as the official beginning of punk rock. Available at https://www.biography.com/people/iggy-pop-201296/

[36] The Ramones, seminal punk rock band formed in 1974 in Queens, New York, by four neighborhood friends: Johnny, Dee Dee, Joey, and Tommy (who was substituted in 1978 by drummer Marky). By 1975, the band had become emblematic of the New York punk scene. They have been since then vastly influential on countless punk, hard-core, and alternative rock bands. The Ramones were inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2002, and in 2011 they became the first punk band to receive a Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award. Available at http://www.anb.org/articles/18/18-03904.html

> I play Lou [Reed][37] and Iggy Pop and this new band the Ramones[38] whenever I paint. I love their energy, their violence, their incredible grinding guitars. It's like an artistic form of assault. I try to translate what I hear into colors and volumes and lines that confront people, that say, "Hey, we're here too and what we think matters!" or more often just "Fuck you!" (García 135)

On his part, Göran Folkestad defends that the development of a musical identity "is not only a matter of age, gender, musical taste and other preferences, but is also a result of the cultural, ethnic, religious and national contexts in which people live" (151). Pilar's choice of music is revealing in that it sheds light on her political orientation, while her connection with these artists also shows that at this point in the novel she is still struggling to establish her own identity. However, as Folkestad sustains:

> Throughout time, people have used music as a means of expression and identification. [...] Music has always played an important part in forming the identities of individuals and of groups of people. [...] It provides a means of defining oneself as an individual belonging to and allied with a certain group, and of defining others as belonging to other groups which are separate from one's own. (151)

Thus, through music at least, Pilar is able to identify with a group within the States: the punk youth, that is, the frustrated segments of American society. Frank Fitzpatrick further suggests that "it might be simply the need to be understood and to find others like you [that] someone who feels different, or outcast, could empathize

[37] See Appendix 2. Figure 4, page 62.

[38] See Appendix 2. Figure 5, page 62.

with an artist." In *Dreaming in Cuban*, young Pilar feels a strong connection to Lou Reed in particular. As the lead singer and songwriter of The Velvet Underground in the 1960s, Lou Reed helped invent punk rock while writing "about people no one else sings about —drug addicts, transvestites, the down-and-out"[39] (García 135). Pilar also suggests that she likes Lou Reed because "you never know what he's going to do next. Lou has about twenty-five personalities. [...] I also feel like a new me sprouts and dies every day" (García 135). This passage reveals Pilar's identification with Reed's main subjects, which are disembodied people and marginal identities mainstream American culture. In a similar thread of thought, José Esteban Muñoz explains this kind of behavior when he maintains that,

> Minority, diasporic, and exiled subjects recalibrate the protocols of selfhood by insisting on the radical hybridity of the self, [...] a hybrid that contains contradicting associations, identifications, and disidentifications. (91)

In contrast with Muñoz's theories on "disidentification," when Pilar attends a Lou Reed's gig at a club in the Village, however, she feels even more alienated because when Reed shouts to the audience that he is from Brooklyn (Pilar's "adopted neighborhood"), she fails to respond:

> "I'm from Brooklyn, man!," Lou shouts and the crowd goes wild. I don't cheer, though. I wouldn't cheer it either if Lou said, "Let's hear it for Cuba." Cuba. Planet Cuba. Where the hell is that? (García 134)

[39] See Appendix 2. Figure 6, page 63.

Next, in a later attempt to find a different form of self-expression from painting, Pilar buys a bass guitar and experiments with it. She then describes her process of starting to play the instrument:

> My whole body is aching by the time I get to my room, but I don't waste any time. I flip straight to the album I want [...]and put on the good, thumping, straight-ahead rock and roll. The thick strings vibrate through my fingers, up my arms, down my chest. I don't know what I'm doing but I start thumping that old spruce dresser of an instrument for all it's worth, thumping and thumping, until I feel my life begin. (García 181)

Interestingly enough, it is the purchase and playing of this bass guitar that begins to give Pilar "insight about selfhood selfhood [...] and signifies progress in her struggle for a bicultural identity" (Scheneiderman 44). Moreover, now Pilar knows subconsciously that in order for her to grow and move forward, she needs to become independent. As Pilar herself puts it, "everything up until this very minute [...] feels like a preparation for something. For what, I don't know. I'm still waiting for my life to begin" (García 179).

4.6. Pilar's Dreaming and Awakening

What is clear, then, is that Pilar Puente's formation as a woman and as an artist implies her necessary reconciliation with family, religion, love, and art. In fact, Pilar firmly believes that if she would return to Cuba, she would be able to build an identity of her own. By the end of the novel, her strong desire to return to Cuba has not

diminished yet, as she still holds vivid memories[40] and longs to return to her native island:

> I was only two years old when I left Cuba but I remember everything that's happened to me since I was a baby, even word-for-word conversations. [...]The skies looked newly washed. And the trees[41] were different too. They looked on fire. I'd run through great heaps of leaves just to hear them rustle like the palm trees during hurricanes in Cuba. But then I'd feel sad looking up at the bare branches and thinking about Abuela Celia. I wonder how my life would have been if I'd stayed with her. (García 26-32)

Pilar's longing for roots and her questioning of what life would have been recurs throughout the novel, which demonstrates the sense of displacement and the idealization of the homeland felt by people in the diaspora (McLeod 244). Therefore, as in most "novels of formation" about immigrants or children of immigrants, Pilar's search for her identity culminates when she finally decides to visit her homeland: "I'm going back to Cuba. I'm fed up with everything around here" (García 25). Similarly to Thea Kronborg, whose artistic awakening takes place when she goes away to a desert canyon far from the city, Pilar uses her time in Cuba to become "more reflective," and soon realizes there that she is no longer part of Cuba's culture and that she actually misses America.

[40] In the literature of exile and migration, the role of memory becomes a key topic in the character's creation and reformulation of identity as a means of coping with the feelings of exile, because "memory is where self is made and remade and where politics can be imagined" (Muñoz 92).

[41] In an interview with Chris Abani, Cristina García claims that she uses the tree "as a symbol of a refuge, as essential connection to a lost or confused mythical past," because for her, "trees do represent crossroads, an opportunity for redemption and change." Available at http://bombmagazine.org/article/2899/cristina-garc-a/

In Pilar's own words: "It's hard to imagine existing without Lou Reed. I ask Abuela Celia if I can paint whatever I want in Cuba and she says yes, as long as I don't attack the state" (García 235).

Moreover, when Pilar sees that artists in Cuba are confronted with a depressed cultural space, she openly states: "Art is the ultimate revolution" (García 235). At this very moment, Pilar becomes fully aware that, while she loves the language, the sights and the Cuban culture in general, she does not really belong there, and recognizes that the Cuba of her dreams is not the Cuba of the current reality:

> I've started dreaming in Spanish, which has never happened before. I wake up feeling different, like something inside me is changing, something chemical and irreversible. [...] I'm afraid to lose all this, to lose Abuela Celia again. But 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. (García 235-36)

All in all, it is at that point of the story that Pilar has finally found both her independence and her cultural identity. She now knows that her place is in the United States, but she also recognizes her Cuban cultural heritage, and knows that she actually might be able to achieve a kind of wholeness at some point in her life as a Cuban-American woman artist.

5. Sandra Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street*: "For Those Who Cannot"

5.1. On Sandra Cisneros and *The House on Mango Street*

Sandra Cisneros (b.1954) [42] is a Mexican-American novelist, poet, essayist, and short story writer whose work fits well into different disciplines, including Women's Studies, American literature, and Mexican American history. Unlike Esperanza, the protagonist of *The House on Mango Street* (1984),[43] who comes to the realization in adolescence that the lives she has been witnessed to, including her own, could serve as the ground of her writing creativity, Sandra Cisneros' "revelation" did not come until she enrolled in the Iowa Writers' Workshop at age twenty-three. There she found her true voice as an author when, compared to her more privileged, wealthier classmates from more stable environments, her cultural difference as a Chicana[44] became clear:

> It wasn't as if I didn't know who I was. I knew I was a Mexican woman. But, I didn't think it had anything to do with why I felt so much imbalance in my life, whereas it had everything to do with it! My race, my gender, and my class. And it didn't make sense until that moment, sitting in that seminar. That's when I decided I would write about something my classmates couldn't write about. (Aranda 65)

She then began to explore her past experiences, which served as the inspiration for many of her stories. As a result, Cisneros' first novel *The House on Mango Street*, is

[42] See Appendix 3. Figure 1, page 64.

[43] See Appendix 3. Figure 2, page 64.

[44] Mexican-American.

an example of Latina Border Writing[45] that addresses many different conflicts and issues related to ethnicity, class, gender, and identity, being a künstlerroman of a young Chicana girl named Esperanza who is experiencing displacement and dislocation in the U.S. The story is made of a collection of small vignettes which act as both chapters of a novel and independent short stories or prose poems, all put together to show a year in Esperanza's life since she moves with her family to a house on Mango Street, a fictional *barrio*[46] of Chicago. While the house on Mango Street is an improvement over her previous residences, it is still not the house she or her family dreams of, and throughout Cisneros's novel Esperanza feels that she does not belong there. From her perspective, we also can see that most of her neighbors live difficult and complicated lives, and while over the course of the year Esperanza explores her world, she experiences the shame of poverty, the unfairness of racism and gender inequality together with the beauty of poetry and music, growing emotionally and artistically by the end.

The role of women within the Latino community is significant, and this novel is indeed dedicated in both Spanish and English "A las Mujeres / To the Women" in particular. Thus, *The House on Mango Street* is often considered a feminist novel (Saldívar-Hull 87; Wissman 159; Daniels 127), but Esperanza does not use "we" throughout to refer to women; instead "we" refers to herself and her family, herself and her girlfriends, and herself and her neighborhood ethnic community —"all brown all around," as she says (Cisneros 28). According to Adriane Veras, the story of Esperanza

[45] Professor Ilan Stavans states that some of the most common themes found in Latino/a writing are, "first and foremost, the idea of the search for a place to call home, individually and collectively: are we at home in America? What does America mean to us? And what do we mean to America? This question of home results in tension between rebellion and consent." Most Latino works also "explore the impact of poverty and alienation on a person's mind and identity" (qtd. in Schama).

[46] A Spanish-speaking quarter or Latino neighborhood in a city or town in the U.S.

in *The House on Mango Street* expresses "the tensions of growing up a minority in a white-dominated society and growing up a woman in a male-dominated society, accompanied with feelings of alienation, loneliness, change and transformation." In fact, the experiences of Esperanza closely resemble those of Sandra Cisneros' childhood. The author was born to a Mexican father and a Mexican American mother in 1954 in Chicago, Illinois, the only daughter of seven children, and *"that* explains everything" ("Only Daughter" 80). The family frequently moved between the *barrio* neighborhoods of Chicago and the areas of Mexico where her father's family lived, and Cisneros, being an only daughter in a family of six sons, often felt lonely. To escape her loneliness and the miseries of poverty, she turned to books and writing poetry, and realized that her aloneness "was good for a would-be writer —it allowed time to think, to imagine, to read and prepare" (Cisneros qtd. in Burrell 80).

Moreover, although in *The House on Mango Street* as well as in other works by Cisneros,[47] some Mexican American women are portrayed "trapped within," in *Interviews with Writers of the Post-Colonial World* Cisneros noted in 1992: "I have to say that the traditional role is kind of a myth. The traditional Mexican woman is a fierce woman. There's a lot of victimization but we are also fierce. We are very fierce" (qtd. in Jussawala and Reed 300). In fact, as Kelly Wissman affirms, "Chicana feminists of the 1980s railed against the confining and taming nature of the home, pointing to the weight of patriarchal traditions in Chicano culture and religion" (18). However, Sandra Cisneros has contended that in her work she is working against stereotypes of Latinas, and is instead working to illuminate and inspire all the "fierce" women who are strong despite adversity (qtd. in Jussawala and Reed 300), such as Esperanza. In fact, Ellen

[47] For example, in *My Wicked, Wicked Ways* (1987), *Woman Hollering Creek* (1991), or *Loose Woman: Poems* (1994).

McCraken points out that Cisneros' protagonist breaks new boundaries with her outward movement into "socio-political reality" (63), because it explores how multiple systems of oppression aim to constrain women's creative endeavours within the domestic sphere.

As in both *The Song of the Lark* and *Dreaming in Cuban*, therefore, the novel's shape and feeling fits its heroine all throughout the narrative, because *The House on Mango Street* continues a paradigm of growth where a young person encounters an outside world, evaluates it in relationship with herself and her art, and then forges an identity, something that includes her sexuality and the prominence of writing her life. Thus, *The House on Mango Street* is, above all, a novel about identity —individual, collective, and gender identity, and mostly about the complexities and varied dimensions of what we usually understand by "artistic identity."

In the following sections, by incorporating different theorizations of Latina feminism, I will then suggest that we can take from Esperanza a distinctly feminist model of a heroine who uses the creative vocation of writing as the main support through which she realizes self-definition, freedom, and independence in this künstlerroman. I will then conclude with a final articulation of how Esperanza can be read as a feminist heroine by employing writing not only as an act of personal freedom but also as a powerful means for social transformation.

5.2. Esperanza

At the beginning, Esperanza analyses the meaning of her own name as symbolic of her identity: "In English my name means "hope." In Spanish it means too many letters. It means sadness, it means waiting" (Cisneros 10). She also explains that she inherited her name from her great-grandmother, "a wild horse of a young woman," who, "tamed" by marriage, spent her days confined in her husband's house:

> She looked out the window all her life. I wonder if she made the best with what she got or was she sorry because she couldn't be all the things she wanted to be. [...] I have inherited her name, but I don't want to inherit her place by the window. (Cisneros 11)

This passage suggests that her name expresses her Mexican heritage as well as a sense of waiting or expectation, and that she hates it because it just contributes to her sense of not belonging. She even complains:"I would like to baptize myself under a new name, a name more like the real me, the one nobody sees. Esperanza as Lisandra or Maritza or Zeze the X" (Cisneros 11). Through naming herself, Esperanza wants both to accept and to alter her identity, because just like the X suggests, there might be something hidden or unknowable about her. What is also clear is that names, words, and language in general become a symbol of identity in Cisneros's novel. At the same time, the image of a red balloon tied to an anchor is a beautiful picture of Esperanza's loneliness when she wonders that,

> Someday I will have a best friend all my own. One I can tell my secrets to. One who will understand my jokes without my having to explain them. Until then I am a red balloon, a balloon tied to an anchor. (Cisneros 9)

In the United States, Esperanza feels misunderstood and lonely, and thinks she does not belong there. Nonetheless, according to Waldinger, "conditions after immigration breed a propensity for self-expression, independence, and instrumentality" (11), and in this case, Esperanza gradually overcomes her feelings of isolation and tries to build her identity through art, more specifically, through writing. Indeed, the red balloon metaphor symbolizes in literature her sadness and her pain and the confusing

sense of displacement she is experiencing, in a similar way to how Pilar Puente's "violent-looking" abstract paintings full of "clotted swirls of red" (García 29) are representative of her anxiety and her anger towards the mainstream American society.

5.3. Building The House of Her Own

In addition, due to her sense of displacement, that empty feeling of being out of place and not belonging, Esperanza plans to find a house of her own, "a house quite as snow, a space for myself to go, clean as paper before the poem," she says (Cisneros 108). In this house she imagines, she will be free to pursue her creative desires, as it is "not an apartment in back. Not a man's house. Not a daddy's. A house all my own. With my porch and my pillow, and my pretty purple petunias. My books and my stories" (Cisneros 108). According Jacqueline Doyle, "Esperanza's "*house of my own*" simultaneously represents throughout the story an escape from the *barrio*, a rejection of the domestic drudgery of home, a solitary space for her creativity and a communal expression of women's lives." In Esperanza's own words, and in contrast with her family's overcrowded tinny apartments, in a house of one's own:

> You could laugh. You could go to sleep and wake up and never have to think who likes and doesn't like you. You could close your eyes and you wouldn't have to worry what people said because you never belonged here anyway and nobody could make you sad and nobody would think you're strange because you like to dream and dream. (Cisneros 83)

Esperanza's longing for a home and a space of her own, just like Thea's in *The Song of the Lark*, can thus be seen as a symbol of her need to develop autonomous self as a woman and artist, yet in order for her to grow and move forward, she must establish

her own identity first —or in Gloria Anzaldúa words, "según la concepción que tiene de sí misma, así será" (105). In Mango Street, Esperanza is able to witness women's oppression, poverty, and loneliness, and explores the tensions between belonging and not belonging —hers is a story, she says, "about a girl who didn't want to belong" (Cisneros 109). At the same time, Esperanza's journey to recreate her life as a young writer is intimately connected to her interactions with those women around her who give advice announce the possibilities of more fulfilling life choices. Consequently, when she embraces her identity as a writer, Mango Street becomes an integral part of herself, the source of her art: "I like to tell stories. I write it down and Mango Street says goodbye sometimes. She does not hold me with both arms. She sets me free" (Cisneros 110).

Esperanza thus refers to that experience of working on something you love, when it seems like the rest of the world just dissolves away and everybody might as well be a ghost and nothing matters except for what is happening right in front of you —you are creating, and then you might feel at peace, or it might come to you as a complete adrenaline rush. Furthermore, it is through writing that Esperanza will speak for herself —"I have decided not to grow up tame like the others who lay their necks on the threshold waiting for the ball and the chain," as and she asserts (Cisneros 82). In this sense, and like the four trees "who grew despite concrete, four who reach and do not forget to reach" (Cisneros 71), Esperanza will try to create a life she has experienced herself,[48] but she will never forget that she has been witness to the suffocating lives of the women from the *barrio*. In fact, as I will explore next, visions of Esperanza as a

[48] Once she has become a professional singer, Cather's heroine Thea Kronborg in *The Song of The Lark* states: "I carry with me the foundation of all I do now" (Cather 395), meaning that her childhood and adolescent experiences also inspire her art and vocal performance.

feminist heroine emerge more strongly by the end of the novel, when she asserts the linking between her writing and her freedom, saying that "I put it down on paper and then the ghost does not ache so much" (Cisneros 100).

5.4. The Writer as Heroine in *The House on Mango Street*

In an environment where "there is too much sadness and not enough sky" (Cisneros 33), Sandra Cisneros offers a way out of such an oppressive situation through writing,[49] because in her novel, defying traditional gender roles and remaining independent is an act of rebellion and a source of self-confidence for Esperanza. Furthermore, Esperanza's dream is "collective and redemptive" (Doyle 19), because her book will tell not only the story of her own artistic development but will also include the stories of the women around her. In fact, in *A Room of One's Own* (1929), Virginia Woolf had already stressed the importance of a female tradition for the woman writer: "We think back through our mothers if we are women" (Woolf 76). For Sandra Cisneros, these mothers might include women outside the traditional role as it is conventionally understood, or just illiterate women who, perhaps anonymously, "handed on the creative spark, the seed of the flower they themselves never hoped to see," as Alice Walker argues in "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens" (1974).

The House on Mango Street certainly depicts what Rachel DuPlessis sees as a "specific biographical drama that has entered and shaped the künstlerroman by women" (93). Such a narrative is engaged with a maternal figure "who is often compensatory for her losses: the daughter will become an artist to extend, reveal, and elaborate her

[49] "There are so few of us writing about the powerless," Cisneros denounces, "and that world, the world of thousands of silent women, [...] needs to be, must be recorded so that their stories can finally be heard" ("Notes" 76).

mother's often thwarted talents" (DuPlessis 93). In this novel, Esperanza's mother points to the girl's *comadres*[50] as examples of the necessity "to take care all your own" (Cisneros 91), and they advise Esperanza not to give up her independence in order to girlfriend or a wife, just like her little sister Nenny insists that "she won't wait her whole life for a husband to come and get her. She wants things all her own to pick and choose" (Cisneros 88). It is clear, then, that the encouragement of Esperanza's mother and aunt, who constantly tell her that writing "will keep her free" (Cisneros 61) and who "listened to every book, every poem she read"[51] (Cisneros 60), is central to her development as a writer, just like it was for the author herself.[52] Therefore, to a certain extent, both Esperanza and Sandra Cisneros are "anti-Rapunzels" (Wissman 29), that is, women who refuse to perpetuate their place by the window —and the associate waiting and passivity this renders— for the vocation of writing. Indeed, the experiences of male oppression, her growing creativity and desire to write, together with her dream of a house of her own push Esperanza to escape from Mango Street.

5.5. The Departure: Esperanza Says Goodbye

Traditionally, "novels of formation" such as this one close with some kind of departure. For instance, Stephen Dedalus in James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* leaves Dublin ready to fly "the nets of nationality, language, and religion" in order to devote himself to art (203). Similarly, by the end of *The House on Mango Street*, Esperanza comes to see beyond the barriers of her neighborhood thanks to the

[50] Literally translated, "comothers," are powerful family figures in Chicano culture; godmothers. Also, "othermothers," in African and African American cultures.

[51] See Appendix 3. Figure 3, page 65.

[52] Allowing "her room of her own," Sandra Cisneros's mother enabled her daughter to create: "I'm here," Cisneros has said, "because my mother let me stay in my room reading and studying, perhaps because she didn't want me to inherit her sadness and her rolling pin" ("Notes" 75).

education gained through her reading and writing —"you can never have too much sky" (Cisneros 33), she thinks. At this point, Esperanza is still living in same family house, but she has matured and is confident that "one day I will pack my bags of books and paper. One day I will say goodbye to Mango Street. I am too strong for her to keep me here forever" (Cisneros 110)— and although this might not happen at all, let us not forget that "nothing happens in the "real" world unless it first happens in the images in our heads" (Anzaldúa 109). That would keep her from being "tamed" and trapped in the same roles as the women who surround her in a system she simply, though painfully, has to leave —an act that reflects the life of herself who remembers she had to leave home in order to write "about those ghosts inside that haunt [her]" ("Notebook" 72-73). Curiously enough, Cisneros has also mentioned that originally she did not even conceive Esperanza as a writer, however,

> As I was gaining my class, gender and racial consciousness, the book changed, the direction changed. I didn't intend for her to be a writer, but I had gotten her into this dilemma, and I didn't know how to get her out. [...] So the only way that I could make her escape the trap of the *barrio* was to make her an artist. (qtd. in Aranda 69)

Finally, Esperanza is sure of herself and her calling in life: she is a writer, and she is going somewhere. Her writing and story-telling allows her to escape from Mango Street emotionally. It is only later on that she will be able to escape physically through her access to education and her financial independence. This way, the author has structured her series of vignettes as a künstlerroman, whereby the final piece circles back to the opening, yet its form evolved gradually. As the witch woman Elenita predicted earlier, Esperanza plans to build through her writing "a new house, a house

made of heart" (Cisneros 64). She eventually will remember the advice she was given and go back to Mango Street figuratively, through writing, "for the ones who cannot out" (Cisneros 110). That means, Esperanza will write for those women who are not strong enough to escape a patriarchal society or do not have the means to do so. Like Sandra Cisneros herself, Esperanza will free them with her stories, and in the tradition of, but distinct from Joyce, that is what she has just accomplished. In addition, by calling herself "a woman writer," Esperanza will pay homage to all those women writers whose words are like kindling, stoking other women's creative embers. Therefore, I suggest that we can take from Esperanza a distinctly feminist model of a heroine who locates the vocation of writing as the fulcrum through which she will hopefully realize self-definition, freedom, and independence.

6. Conclusions

As the evidence above suggests, Thea's, Pilar's and Esperanza's transformation at the end of the respective novels unveil how art, whether it be music, painting or literature, enhances the development of a positive self-identity and provides motivation and a sense of belonging to these women artists. Furthermore, the main theme interconnecting Willa Cather's *The Song of The Lark*, Cristina García's *Dreaming in Cuban* and Sandra Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street* are their female protagonists' desire to achieve their individual artistic goals as well as their struggle to accomplish them. In doing so, Cather, García and Cisneros come to depict young vocational female artists who go out into the world in quest of their interests and yearnings. At the same time, they try to find a way to escape from the oppressive world around them in order to find their own voice, both personal and artistic, and, in the process, they create their own identity.

Taken all this into consideration, it becomes clear that Cather, García and Cisneros have used each their own inventiveness and artistic language also to reformulate stereotypical images, since their characters portray young women who are able to choose and make their own way despite the many obstacles. Moreover, these authors have boldly suggested that neither female musicians and painters, nor writers, have ever been free from personal and/or social restrictions, yet they have made the most of the expressive resources available to them and performed their own rebellious acts of self-expression in their chosen creative field. Furthermore, these artists in the making are brave enough to reject a patriarchal system that would not only define them as wives and mothers but would also limit and restrain their artistic autonomy. Thus, in these modern künstlerromans, the woman artist is characterized by an undeniable hunger to create or re-invent whatever it is in her life in order to break down any heavily-constructed walls and moulds around her. In fact, it is this type of mentality that Carter, García and Cisneros accurately depict that drives women artists to aspire to be unique and represent themselves the way they feel inside, and not as society might dictate. More than anything because, in the end, creativity is not just about evolution — it is freedom.

It might be concluded, then, that fictional female artists in literature, like Thea, Pilar and Esperanza, can serve in real life as "creative muses," models for generations of women from different social and cultural backgrounds to follow, educating, challenging and inspiring them to create and live boldly, with respect to each other's creativity, and without apology to society. For this reason, I believe that Cather, García and Cisneros' works, among many others, will and should continue to encourage further study about the connection between a woman's life and her art.

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Appendix 1

Figure 1. Portrait of Willa Cather.

Figure 2. Front cover of Cather's *The Song of the Lark* (1915).

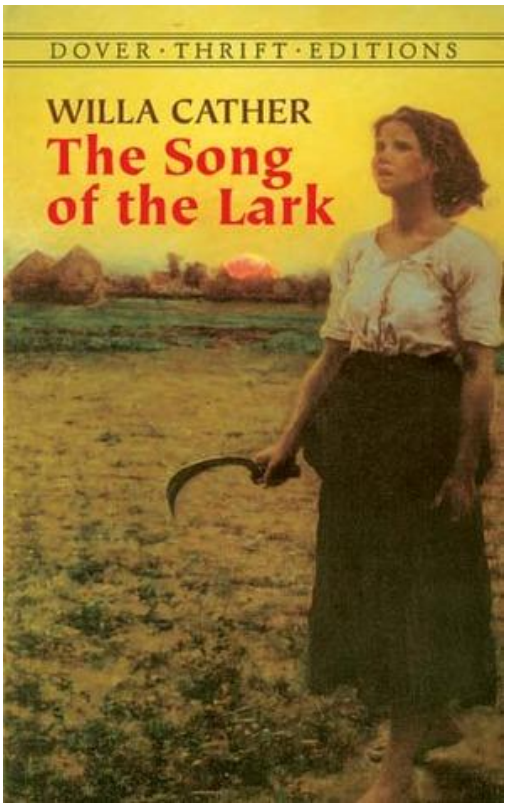
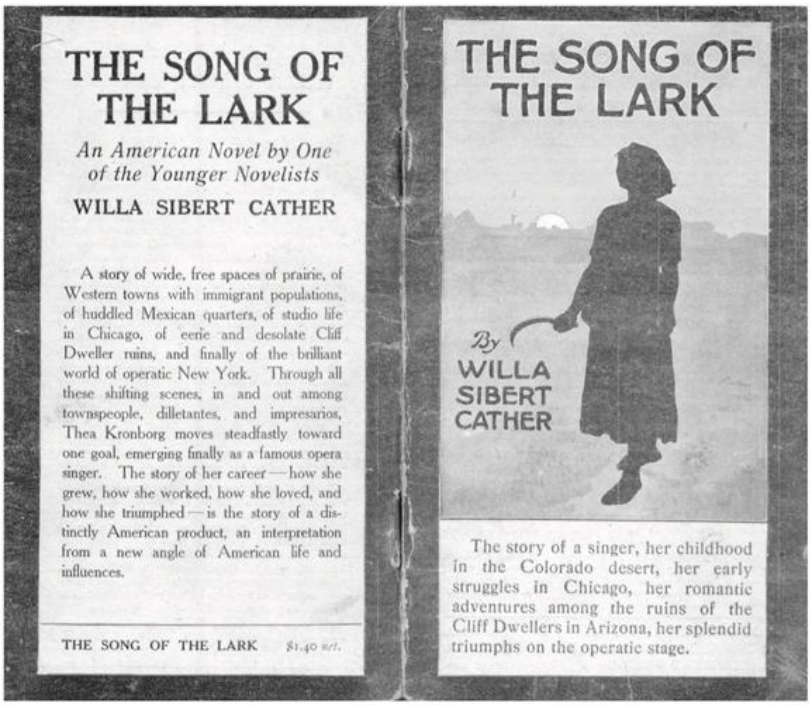


Figure 3. Portrait of opera singer Olive Fremstad (1871-1951).

Figure 4. Walnut Canyon, Arizona, the prototype for Panther Canyon.

Figure 5. *The Song of the Lark*, painting by Jules Breton in The Art Institute of Chicago.

Figure 6: Cover of 1915 promotional booklet for *The Song of the Lark*. Willa Cather Collection, Drew University Library.



Appendix 2

Figure 1. Portrait of Cristina García.

Figure 2. Front cover of García's *Dreaming in Cuban* (1992).

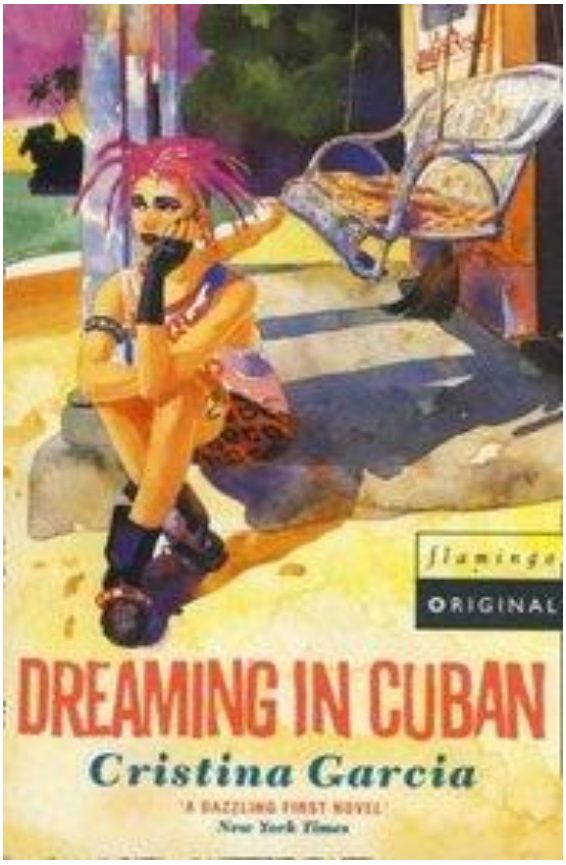


Figure 3. Portrait of visual and performance artist Ana Mendieta (1948-1985).

Figure 4. Portrait of Lou Reed by Mick Rock (1972).

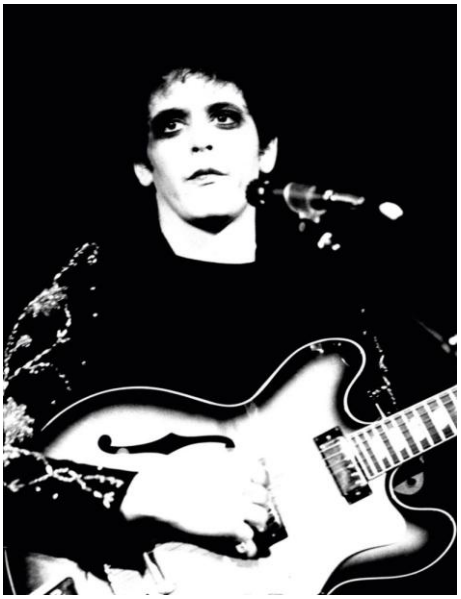


Figure 5. Front cover of the Ramones' self-titled debut album (1974).

Figure 6. Lyrics to Lou Reed's "Walk on the Wild Side" (1972).

Holly came from Miami F.L.A.
Hitch-hiked her way across the U.S.A.
Plucked her eyebrows on the way
Shaved her legs and then he was a she
She said, hey babe, take a walk on the wild side,
Said, hey honey, take a walk on the wild side.

Candy came from out on the island,
In the backroom she was everybody's darling,
But she never lost her head
Even when she was giving head
She says, hey baby, take a walk on the wild side
Said, hey babe, take a walk on the wild side
And the colored girls go,

Doo doo doo doo doo doo doo doo doo

Little Joe never once gave it away
Everybody had to pay and pay
A hustle here and a hustle there
New York City is the place where they said:
Hey babe, take a walk on the wild side
I said hey Joe, take a walk on the wild side

Sugar Plum Fairy came and hit the streets
Lookin' for soul food and a place to eat
Went to the Apollo
You should have seen him go, go, go
They said, hey Sugar, take a walk on the wild side
I said, hey babe, take a walk on the wild side, alright

Jackie is just speeding away
Thought she was James Dean for a day
Then I guess she had to crash
Valium would have helped that bash
She said, hey babe, take a walk on the wild side
I said, hey honey, take a walk on the wild side
And the colored girls say

Doo doo doo doo doo doo doo doo doo

Appendix 3

Figure 1. Portrait of Sandra Cisneros.

Figure 2. Front cover of Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street* (1984).

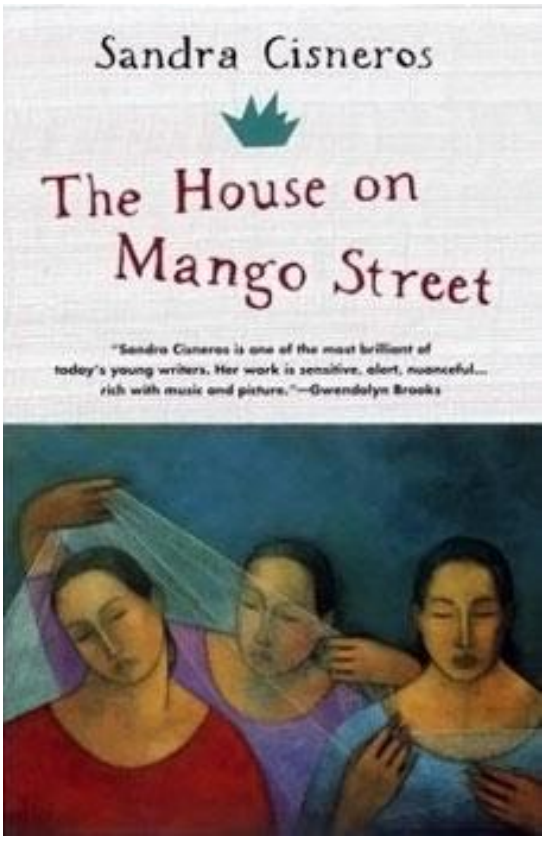


Figure 3. Poem written by Esperanza in *The House on Mango Street* (Cisneros 60-61).

I want to be
like the weaves in the sea
like the clouds in the wind,
but I'm me.
One day I'll jump
out of my skin.
I'll shake the sky
like a hundred violins.