

The Rejected and Reclaimed Mother in Sandra Cisneros's *Caramelo*

Sandra Cisneros's most recent novel, Caramelo, has received little critical attention thus far, and none of which examines mother-daughter themes. By highlighting the maternal relationships in this novel, my paper will add to current mother-daughter literary criticism. In addition, very little scholarship has investigated maternal themes in Chicana literature, marking my paper as what I hope to be a valuable contribution in an under-studied field. The daughter in Cisneros's novel, Celaya Reyes, refuses to model herself after her mother, and it is only by reclaiming the mother that the daughter may gain insight into her own life. Celaya's identity is closely tied to her status as her mother's daughter, despite her oppositional stance to what her mother represents, namely tradition and a seeming complicity with sexism within the family and Mexican culture. I argue that Celaya's rejection of her mother stems from her attempt to resist patriarchal family dynamics and to a greater extent, the rampant patriarchy of the Mexican social structure; that is, she rejects aligning herself with her mother, as she believes she can become more than her mother, more than "simply" a wife, daughter-in-law, and mother, roles a Mexican woman is destined to be. A part of this identity-formation involves reclaiming her paternal grandmother; Celaya's narration of her grandmother's story grants her (and subsequently, her mother) subjectivity and a valid, non-marginalized role within the family. Can telling her grandmother's story shed light on Celaya's own mother-daughter conflict and thus heal the wounds that mother and daughter inflict upon each other? Can the act of narrating a maternal story humanize and reclaim the mothers in her family and simultaneously offer an opportunity for Celaya to engage in self-formation? These are significant questions the novel posits, which I intend to discuss.

There is nothing Mexican men revere more than their mamas; they are the most devoted of sons, perhaps because their mamas are the

most devoted of mamas ... when it comes to their boys. (Cisneros, 2002: 128)

The maternal relationship discussed in this paper illustrates the ambivalent nature of the mother/daughter bond between women. On the one hand, the protagonist daughter in Sandra Cisneros's novel *Caramelo* desires a connection with her mother and wants to learn about her mother's life prior to being her mother; yet, it is while undergoing the confusing, often tormented period of adolescence and young adulthood that the daughter Celaya Reyes attempts to break free from maternal identification. Identifying with the mother, she believes, sacrifices the identity she is in the process of developing. Is it possible to unite the differing perspectives the mother and daughter hold regarding their family, their Mexican/Chicano culture, and their roles as women within the family? Although a challenging task, the text suggests that mothers and daughters can come to a compromise when both members of the dyad make efforts to unite together, rather than alienate each other from their lives. The daughter initially rejects her mother's influence over her life by trying to break free from her, yet later learns that rejecting the maternal bond is a rejection of herself, for "the importance of the relationship between mother and daughter in a woman's ... formation of her female identity" is evident throughout the novel (Eysturoy, 1996: 116).

Celaya's identity is closely tied to her status as her mother's daughter, despite her oppositional stance to what her mother represents, namely tradition and a seeming complicity with sexism within the family and Mexican culture. I argue that Celaya's rejection of her mother stems from her attempt to resist patriarchal family dynamics and to a greater extent, the rampant patriarchy of the Mexican social structure; that is, she rejects aligning herself with her mother, as she believes she can become more than her mother, more than "simply" a wife, daughter-in-law, and mother, roles a Mexican woman is destined to be. Throughout the novel, we see Celaya's attempt to establish a voice and a place for herself within her Chicano family structure. A part of this identity-formation involves reclaiming her paternal grandmother, who initially appears to be a difficult-to-please, demanding woman who caters to her sons' every desire; Celaya's narration of her grandmother's story, however, serves to overturn that simplistic rendering by giving her grandmother (and subsequently, her mother) subjectivity and a valid, non-marginalized role within the family. Can telling her grandmother's story shed light on Celaya's own mother-daughter conflict and thus heal the wounds that mother and daughter inflict upon each other? Can the act of narrating a maternal story humanize and reclaim the mothers in her family and simultaneously offer an opportunity for Celaya to engage in self-formation? These are significant questions the novel posits, which I intend to discuss. To date, scholars have not investigated mother/daughter dynamics in Cisneros's novel, resulting in what I believe to be an overwhelming lack of research in this area. Scholarship on mother/daughter themes in Chicana

literature is also heavily underrepresented. My paper contributes to mother-daughter research by centralizing an under-studied novel by a Chicana writer that has much to say about the Chicano family and mother-daughter relations within this patriarchal unit.

Sandra Cisneros's most recent novel, *Caramelo*, published in 2002, is a text that portrays the complexity of the mother-daughter relationship by featuring a head-strong narrator/protagonist Celaya "Lala" Reyes, who yearns for a maternal connection while she simultaneously attempts to construct her own identity. That the novel is written from the daughter's point of view is significant: "Stories about women's quests for identity are usually written from the perspective of daughters (a perspective every woman retains, even after she has become a mother herself). The daughter wants to define either her own identity or that of the woman she has only known as "mother" (Koppelman, 1985: xix-xx). The daughter, in reclaiming the mother, is also on a quest to reclaim her female self that has been de-valued by both the dominant society and her own ethnic culture. What is significant of the daughter's search for identity is her inherent need to do this by "separating from her mother" (Koppelman, 1985: xx).

The novel is divided into three sections and takes place in Chicago, Mexico City, and San Antonio, spanning three generations of the Reyes family as narrated by Celaya, including a detailed account of her paternal grandmother's life-story. Celaya's search for her identity is challenged by the family dynamics: as the youngest child and sole daughter among six brothers, her voice is overshadowed by her male siblings. In a culture that validates patriarchy, Celaya turns to her mother in an effort to forge a female bond, yet her mother is heavily influenced by patriarchal Mexican codes of maternal behavior that reinforce the favoritism of sons, thus leading Celaya to question her role as a daughter and as a female. Because Celaya is the only daughter, it is expected that she will someday inherit her mother's role. Cisneros's novel thus "represents the new mestiza/Chicana consciousness of daughters who resist and refuse to accept the constraints against which their mothers and grandmothers have chafed and which limited their lives" (Madsen, 2000: 40). Celaya is torn between expectations by her family to be her mother's helper and her own deep-rooted desire to form an identity unlike her mother's, which as my paper demonstrates, is a major factor in Celaya's rejection of her mother.

In writing this novel, Cisneros borrowed aspects from her own life, making some parts from the text autobiographical. Cisneros's statement, "I am the only daughter in a family of six sons. *That* explains everything" (1997: 119) sums up a prominent theme found in her fiction: the marginalization of Chicanas growing up in the Mexican culture that places more value on men's accomplishments. Cisneros clarifies her role within the family by adding that she is "the only daughter in a *Mexican* family of six sons," and she believes her role as "the only daughter of a Mexican father and a Mexican-American mother or ... the only daughter of a working-class family of nine ... had everything to do with who

I am today” (Cisneros, 1997: 119). As this statement makes clear, Cisneros’s working-class background, gender, and the conflicts that arise between the clash of American and Mexican cultures played crucial roles in the formation of her identity. Undoubtedly these sentiments resemble Celaya’s feelings as she grows up witnessing the privileges her brothers receive simply because they are born male. By re-using this subtext of the need for female validation in essay and finally novel form, Cisneros clearly demonstrates that prescribed gender roles must be transcended in order to liberate Chicanas.

Central to the novel is Celaya’s budding awareness of Mexican cultural influences that perpetuate her mother Zoila’s favoritism toward her sons, resulting in Celaya’s often resentful attitude toward her mother, as María Gonzales (1996b) explains: “Feminists have been arguing for years that a mother who favors her sons over her daughters destroys the self-worth of the daughters. That search for self-worth becomes a theme in much of the work by Mexican American women authors” (163). In fact, Ana Castillo’s essay, “Toward the Mother-Bond Principle” from her highly influential collection of essays *Massacre of the Dreamers* reiterates this point: “...while girls are taught that they must be givers of affection and caretaking, they are not always given the message that they are deserving of receiving nurturing” (1994: 190). Chicana playwright and essayist Cherrie Moraga (2000) echoes this sentiment, saying, “Ask, for example, any Chicana mother about her children and she is quick to tell you she loves them all the same, but she doesn’t. *The boys are different*” (93-94). As daughters form their Chicana political consciousness, they witness their mothers’ preferential treatment of sons, thereby trying to “earn” the same love and affection their brothers receive. Daughters, then, may question their worthiness in a family structure that places them second to males. A question that arises within the works of Chicana writer-daughters is whether there can ever be a mutual understanding between mothers and daughters, a common recognition between women whose lives are dictated by Mexican codes of conduct.

How can the daughters come to terms with their mothers’ apparent complicity with the oppression of women? Clearly, an issue of concern in the novel is Celaya’s feelings of doubt involving her mother’s love for her. Why cannot Zoila show affection toward her daughter? Although later as an adult Celaya comes to understand patriarchal traditions that shape Zoila’s favoritism toward her sons, she cannot comprehend this while she is growing up, leading to the resentment she harbors toward her mother. Celaya’s role as story-teller of her paternal grandmother’s life enables her to critique the culture that places more value on the mother-son relationship than that between mother and daughter. Narrating her grandmother’s story may heal Celaya’s feelings of resentment and hostility toward her mother. Moreover, Celaya’s narration of her grandmother’s story is imperative to her development as a writer, also enabling her to recognize and challenge Mexican customs that serve to dismantle the bond between Celaya and her own mother.

As a young girl, Celaya is astutely aware of her mother's confinement to Mexican decorum that outlines her responsibilities as wife and mother. Describing her mother as "washing our clothes herself" and "muttering and spitting and grunting things I can't quite hear under her breath," (Cisneros, 2002: 64) Celaya becomes an active observer of the limited roles women are expected to assume, that of wife and mother. Zoila confides in her daughter in hopes of establishing female empathy. On their daily walks every summer in Mexico City while visiting her father's mother, the "Awful Grandmother," Celaya comes to realize her mother's frustration: "Mother with those cat-eyed sunglasses, looking out at the street, out at nowhere, out at nothing at all, sighing. A long time. ... And I think to myself how beautiful my mother is, looking like a movie star right now, and not our mother who has to scrub our laundry" (65-66). Celaya distinguishes her mother from that woman who "has to" do domestic chores; to Celaya, her mother is "beautiful," revealing her ability to appreciate her mother for her aesthetic, rather than domestic value.

Although Zoila does not articulate her discontentment, Celaya voices this herself by expressing her dissatisfaction with Zoila's role as wife and mother. As the only other female in the family, Celaya empathizes with her mother, and in her critique of Zoila's role, she is also lamenting the possibility that she, too will someday inherit her mother's place as caretaker of the family. To Celaya, Zoila represents more than simply the woman who cleans after them; she represents beauty and grace, someone worthy of admiration. Indeed, even at her young age Celaya aptly discovers a contradiction inherent to the Mexican culture. Mothers are believed to be revered, yet this seeming high regard relies on the fulfillment of their "obligations" of producing children and being efficient in domestic responsibilities.

Zoila's and Celaya's daily walks serve to establish a female, maternal connection free from male interference: "And I'm so happy to have my mother all to myself buying good things to eat, and talking, just to me, without my brothers bothering us" (Cisneros, 2002: 66). In a home that is occupied predominantly by males, the outdoors become a sanctuary for maternal bonding, offering Zoila and Celaya an opportunity to establish their own feminine space; thus, the presence of male members of the family is seen as intrusion, leading Celaya to desire a connection with her mother outside the home that is occupied by the rest of the family. But patriarchy betrays that maternal bond; upon return from one of their walks, Celaya tells her family where she and her mother have been, thereby "breaking the spell": "And now why is everyone angry just because we ate in a restaurant? I don't know anything except I know this. I am the reason why Mother is screaming: -I can't stand it anymore, I'm getting the hell out of here" (66). Celaya cannot comprehend why "just" eating in a restaurant would incite anger or suspicion from the family. Interestingly, Celaya's joyous walk with her mother is described as a "spell" that Celaya breaks when she lets in on their secret. As this passage demonstrates, female connections and secrecy

are shunned and viewed as a threat to masculine order. While in Mexico, Zoila realizes that she must abide by traditions that limit a woman's mobility outside the home. As an American-born Chicana, these seemingly archaic traditions conflict with her more Americanized notions of female independence, especially given the fact that she knows this kind of behavior would have been tolerated in the States, even by her own husband. During their stay in Mexico, Zoila learns that excursions without the accompaniment of a male chaperone and male protection are culturally taboo.

Later in the trip, Zoila learns that her husband Inocencio fathered a child prior to his marriage to Zoila. Upon learning this secret from the Awful Grandmother, Zoila flees from the moving car, yet Celaya questions her mother's options: "But where can Mother go? She doesn't have any money. All she's got is her husband and kids, and now she doesn't even want us" (Cisneros, 2002: 83). Although Celaya empathizes with her mother, she feels betrayed as well, believing that Zoila no longer wants her. She thus questions if she has in some way hindered her mother's options. As a Mexican American wife and mother, Zoila is financially dependent on her husband, leaving Celaya to accurately state that her mother's options are limited. Once again, as in the previous passage, Celaya's thoughts are tinged with feelings of guilt for her mother's limited roles as dutiful wife and mother. Celaya feels guilty for being an added burden, as if her role as daughter has contributed to her mother's feelings of imprisonment. As a female, Celaya aligns herself with her mother, despite feeling betrayed and saddened that her mother "doesn't even want" her anymore. Moreover, the Awful Grandmother cannot situate herself as her daughter-in-law's ally, as she tells her son Inocencio: "*Mijo*"—the Grandmother intervenes—"Let her be. You're better off without her kind. Wives come and go, but mothers, you have only one!" (85). The Awful Grandmother is a product of patriarchy, and because of this she must defend the male, even if his actions are questionable.

Although the Grandmother is called "Awful," it is Celaya's duty as narrator and writer to shed light on how her Grandmother became this way. Celaya sees that it is her responsibility to give voice to the maligned female who cannot speak for herself. By telling her Grandmother's story of pain and suffering, Celaya comes to understand the role that Mexican patriarchy has played in forming her Grandmother's character. The Grandmother's story may also serve as a mode of connection between Celaya and her own mother. If Celaya can learn that the Awful Grandmother's character was learned, that is, shaped by the hardships and tragedies that result from being born female in a male-dominated culture, then she may come to understand why her relationship with Zoila has become conflicted.

By underscoring the significance of the mother-daughter bond, the novel also serves as a sharp criticism of the idealization of mothers by sons and the preference placed on this relationship. Yet this idealization of mother actually belies the systematic subordination of women inherent within pa-

triarchy; that is, mothers are worshipped yet held in passive roles. This critique is seen in Celaya's narration of the Awful Grandmother Soledad's story. When growing up in her future mother-in-law's home, Soledad observes her husband-to-be's absolute devotion to his mother and vice versa: "It's amazing how blind Mexican sons are to their mothers' shortcomings. A meddling, quarrelsome, difficult, possessive mother is seen only as a mother who loves her child too much, instead of the things she is—an unhappy, lonely person" (Cisneros, 2002: 165). Mexican sons, according to Celaya, fail to admit their mothers' faults because they often idealize them as sacred figures rather than as flesh-and-blood beings. As women possessing limited power and autonomy, motherhood becomes their sole source of identity and happiness. The novel demonstrates that a woman's role in the Mexican culture is limited to that of daughter, wife, and mother; women's influence is chiefly visible through motherhood. Celaya attacks her culture's strict value-placing on the relationship between mother and son and challenges the sons' idealization of mothers. In this glorified role, mothers are essentially stripped of any semblance of humanity. Thus, it comes as no surprise that a Chicana writer such as Cisneros would intentionally create realistic mothers with imperfections and flaws.

As Celaya grows into a teenager, she becomes a sharp critic of patriarchy that distorts the maternal relationship and leads to her alienation from her mother. While the young Celaya admired her mother's beauty, the teenaged version scoffs at being compared to her: "Father adds, *Ay, que Lalita*. You're just like your mother. I'm nothing at all like Mother!" (Cisneros, 2002: 238). Celaya desires an identity that is independent of her mother; moreover, the disconnection that arises between mother and daughter stems from Celaya's determination to create a life unlike her mother's. She does not want to be "just like" her mother, for this means she will inherit her mother's role in the home: "In a patriarchal context, . . . the relationship between mother and daughter is charged with ambiguities, because accepting the mother as a role model may signify accepting oppressive, socially prescribed norms of womanhood" (Eys-turoy, 1996: 116-117). As a Chicana, Celaya desires more than what her mother represents, leading her to believe that any identification with the mother means she will have to sacrifice an integral part of her self. Celaya's role as a daughter raised by Mexican and Chicano cultural standards is at odds with her desire for independence and freedom, values preached by America. Celaya does not easily identify with the American society, but she is nonetheless influenced by these "American" values.

This cultural tension is at the root of the mother-daughter relationship, as María Gonzales (1996b) argues: "Contemporary Mexican American women prose writers depict in their texts female characters preoccupied with the conflicts inherent in the relationship between mothers and daughters who are members of a community that receives its cultural values from two worlds often in conflict, U.S. mainstream culture and Mexican culture" (153). Celaya feels

insulted by the comparison to her mother, given that she interprets it as an undermining of her need to assert her own identity and voice. Celaya's desire to construct her own voice may be read as distinctly American; however, she is astute enough to realize that her ethnicity has relegated her to a marginalized, invisible figure in American society. Celaya's refusal to be silenced goes against decorum deemed appropriate for Mexican women, leaving her caught between two value systems. How can she give herself a voice while remaining true to her Mexican heritage? This struggle is undoubtedly inherent to the Chicana experience.

As the only daughter and youngest child, Celaya detests the Mexican culture's limited value placed on daughters: "There is no commandment that says honor thy daughter" (243). She questions the notion of honoring the mother when she as a daughter is relegated to a lower status than her older brothers. A connection with her mother amidst the Mexican culture's inherent male superiority is unfathomable to Celaya: "How could Father say I'm like her! Even she admits I take after him. Says even as a baby I was *una chillona*. How she had to wear me on her hip like a gun, and even then I wouldn't stop crying. I drove her crazy. Now she drives me crazy" (242). Celaya's resentment toward her mother sharply contrasts her infancy, when she was literally attached to her mother's hip.

Why would she compare herself to a violent weapon? Celaya's attachment to her mother's hip here is not interpreted as a form of safety or security, but rather, an added burden or weight she must carry. Earlier, I discussed Celaya's guilt for burdening her mother, but the roles have been reversed. Zoila now unwittingly drives Celaya crazy. Ironically, mother and daughter are similar in their ability to incite *locura* in each other. But it is because of this intimacy they share as mother and daughter that they know exactly how to inflict pain on each other and hence, drive each other crazy. This commonality drives them further apart from each other, and what once was a relationship marked by close attachment is now one replaced by disconnection and hurt.

The bond that Celaya desires with her mother is integral to her development as a self-defined woman. Celaya looks to her mother as a potential ally and confidante, yet as a mother of six sons and one daughter, Zoila prioritizes her bond with her boys: "Mother's never been on my side about anything.... Father would like to think me and Mother are friends, but what kind of friend can't hear you when you're talking to her?" (Cisneros, 2002: 362). Celaya is saddened and angered by what appears to be her mother's indifference toward her. According to Celaya, Zoila fails to hear her when she's talking, illustrating her desire to be heard by her mother, someone she believes would "be on her side" due to their shared gender. Celaya is upset at being compared to her mother, yet it is somewhat ironic that she would nevertheless desire maternal recognition. She may not want to be like her mother, but she wants to be seen by her. Because of her detachment from her mother, Celaya struggles to find her place in the world.

Given that Celaya feels devalued by her mother and culture, she attempts to distance herself from Zoila, yet she is cognizant of how a daughter is “supposed” to feel about her mother:

You're supposed to think good thoughts, hold holy her memory, call out to her when you're in danger, bid her come bless you. But I never think of Mother without dodging to get out of her way, the whoosh of her hand quicker than the enemy's machete, the pinch of her thumb and index finger meaner than a carnival *guacamaya*. (Cisneros, 2002: 361)

Although Celaya witnesses the idealization of mothers very much present in the Mexican culture, she refuses to sanctify her mother. Mothers are “supposed” to be revered and respected by their daughters. However, Zoila is seen as more of an enemy and an arch rival rather than a deified, sacred figure. Interestingly, we once again see images of weapons associated with the maternal figure; in a previous passage, Celaya is “like a gun” on her mother’s hip, and here Zoila’s hand is described as “quicker than the enemy’s machete.”

It is significant that both Celaya and Zoila are compared to weapons, suggesting that the two women are symbolically killing each other slowly through words and actions. The gun and machete situate the two women as enemies, each woman waiting for the other to pull the trigger, permanently alienating one from another. She wonders how she can possibly honor her mother when her mother does not honor her; she is at odds with the culturally-ascribed mandate to “hold holy” her mother. Further, Celaya is wise enough to understand that this mandate to honor and revere the mother is a tool used by patriarchy to keep women “in their place.” The reverence held for mothers contrasts with the actual treatment of women within the family. Celaya’s knowledge that a good daughter is “supposed” to love her mother may be read as an admission of guilt and even sadness that their relationship is flawed. Significantly, Celaya does not necessarily blame her mother or herself for their strained relationship. More than anything, Celaya tries to come to some explanation for their distance from each other.

This tug-of-war of between Celaya’s search for identity and what she perceives as her mother’s antagonism and lack of compassion is at the root of the miscommunication and misunderstanding between mother and daughter:

“What’s wrong with you?” Mother asks.

“Since when do you care?” I say to mother. “All you ever worry about is your boys.” You spoiled brat, selfish, smart-mouthy, smart-alecky, smart-ass, I’ll teach you. There are tears in her eyes that she won’t let out of her eyes. She can’t. She doesn’t know how to cry....

“Come back here, crybaby,” Mother shouts good and loud. “Where you going? I said come back here, *huerca*. I’m talking to you! When I

catch you I'm going to give you two good conks on your head with my *chancla*. You hear me! Do you hear! Then you'll know what depressed means." (Cisneros, 2002: 364)

Within this family setting, mothers like Zoila "function at times to stifle growth and development; they serve as symbols of repression, of a tradition that stifles" (Rebolledo, 1987: 150). Celaya is thus not only fighting her mother, but attempting to fend off a culturally-prescribed role as "dutiful daughter" that she feels is oppressive. Both Celaya and Zoila hurl accusations at each other, unable to hear each other over the noise they create. Zoila is shocked by Celaya's accusation, yet she is unable to express this grief because "she doesn't know how to cry," suggesting that Zoila guards herself against this type of emotion. Celaya's accusation visibly pains Zoila, but rather than cry, Zoila threatens violence. Why does Cisneros make several connections between violence and maternity? For one thing, Zoila's threats to "conk" her daughter on the head and the "pinch of her thumb," etc., contrast the image of helpless, suffering, victimized mother deified by Mexican sons. But as the novel makes clear, the seemingly harmless, gentle mother does, in fact, hold the capacity to inflict violence upon other women. It is the daughters who must succumb to the violence from their mothers, although, realistically speaking, both mothers and daughters are equally threatened by the possibility of male violence.

The inability to cry functions as yet another deterrent to a maternal connection. Crying requires vulnerability, yet both mother and daughter are on guard with each other, restraining emotions aside from anger. Central to this passage is what Celaya interprets as Zoila's inability to empathize with her. Zoila should not be easily dismissed as a deliberately cruel woman who intentionally hurts her daughter, yet why can she not show empathy toward her? Celaya believes it is because Zoila prefers her sons, but I would argue that although Zoila's behavior would appear to affirm this, the rationale extends beyond this perceived favoritism. Because Zoila's role as mother has been shaped by Mexican patriarchy, she is expected to overly-protect and coddle her male children, often at the expense of the daughter. Without a doubt Zoila loves her daughter, but prescribing to Mexican patriarchal motherhood dictates that she indulge her sons and socialize her daughter to follow these rules.

In an effort to escape her confinement within the home, Celaya runs away with her boyfriend, Ernie Calderón. Although by this time her grandmother is dead, Celaya is haunted by her grandmother's presence. As a writer and more importantly as a daughter and granddaughter living within a male-dominated culture, Celaya has the capacity to comprehend the significance of her grandmother's story and its need to be told:

Oh, it's terrible being a woman. The world doesn't pay attention to you until you grow tetas, and then once they dry up, you turn invisible again....

You'll tell my story, won't you, Celaya? So that I'll be understood?
So that I'll be forgiven? (Cisneros, 2002: 408)

What Soledad truthfully conveys to Celaya is the inherent sexism within the Mexican culture. Women are valued for their physical attributes, reproductive abilities, and little else. In this light, women are worthy for what they produce for patriarchy, namely children. By witnessing the privileging of males by her mother and grandmother, Celaya determines to challenge this by learning to value the feminine. Soledad urges the telling of her story so that she may be "forgiven," suggesting to Celaya (and readers) that perhaps learning about her life will humanize this "Awful Grandmother." It is Celaya who is in danger of succumbing to rigid rules and expectations imposed on her by family and culture, making her the ideal person to narrate Soledad's life. Celaya has the most to learn from Soledad's life, enabling her to not only portray the Awful Grandmother more empathetically, but also granting Celaya the opportunity to reclaim the mothers in her family.

It is much later, while celebrating her parents' thirty-year wedding anniversary that Celaya comes to voice her awareness of her close family ties. In recognizing this, she reclaims the mother:

And I realize with all the noise called "talking" in my house, that talking is nothing but talking, that is so much a part of my house and my past and myself you can't hear it as several occasions, but as one roar like the roar inside a shell, I realize then that this is my life, with its dragon arabesques of voices and lives intertwined, rushing like a Ganges, irrevocable and wild, carrying away everything in reach, whole villages, pigs, shoes, coffeepots, and that little basket inside the coffeepot that Mother always loses each morning and has to turn the kitchen upside down looking for until someone thinks to look in the garbage. (Cisneros, 2002: 424)

Celaya gives voice to these "dragon arabesques of voices"; significantly, she gives voice to her grandmother who by strict gender assignments is silenced. Although Celaya at first wants to break away from familial bonds, she later learns that this rejection of family and the mother reinforces her unhappiness. Moreover, Celaya's admission that she has "turned into" the Awful Grandmother (Cisneros, 2002: 424) solidifies her recognition of the valuable roles her grandmother and mother have played in shaping her life. She discovers that she is not so unlike her Awful Grandmother or her mother, for that matter. In affirming her grandmother's role in shaping her life, Celaya attests to the importance of acknowledging the bond between women. Initially, she does everything in her power to reject both mother and grandmother, but instead chooses to give them voice and in the end, she discovers her writer's voice as well.

Cisneros's novel sends a common message about the role the mother-daughter relationship plays in the development of female identity. Conflicts may arise between the relationship and the formation of an identity, yet the daughter/protagonist must come to terms with the knowledge that a rejection of the mother is a rejection of herself. By reclaiming the mother as a significant force in her life, Celaya may better endure stumbling blocks and other hardships that may hinder her path to self-development. As the text demonstrates, it is the responsibility of the writer/daughter to conceive of the possibility of the union between mother and daughter without sacrificing the unique self. Daughters who yearn to create an identity separate from the mother must learn to acknowledge that their mothers are daughters as well, and perhaps their mothers were once in the same position in which these daughters now find themselves.

References

- Castillo, Ana. 1994. *Massacre of the Dreamers: Essays on Xicanisma*. New York: Plume.
- Cisneros, Sandra. 2002. *Caramelo*. New York: Vintage.
- Cisneros, Sandra. 1997. "Only Daughter." *Máscaras*. Ed. Lucha Corpi. Berkeley: Third Woman Press,
- Eysturoy, Annie O. 1996. *Daughters of Self-Creation: The Contemporary Chicana Novel*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.
- Gonzales, María C. 1996a. *Contemporary Mexican-American Women Novelists: Toward a Feminist Identity*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc.
- Gonzales, María C. 1996b. "Love and Conflict: Mexican American Women Writers as Daughters." *Women of Color: Mother-Daughter Relationships in 20th Century Literature*. Ed. Elizabeth Brown-Guillory. Austin: University of Texas Press. 153-171.
- Koppelman, Susan, ed. 1985. Introduction. *Between Mothers and Daughters: Stories Across a Generation*. Old Westbury, NY: The Feminist Press. xv-xxxix.
- Madsen, Deborah L. 2000. *Understanding Contemporary Chicana Literature*. South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press.
- Moraga, Cherríe. 2000. *Loving in the War Years: lo que nunca pasó por sus labios*. 1983. Cambridge: South End Press.
- Rebolledo, Tey Diana. 1987. "Abuelitas: Mythology and Integration in Chicana Literature." *Woman of her Word: Hispanic Women Write*. Ed. Evangelina Vigil. Houston: Arte Público Press. 148-58.