

Autoethnography and Garcia's Dreaming in Cuban

Samantha L. McAuliffe

*University of North Carolina Chapel Hill*

Follow this and additional works at: <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb>



Part of the [Comparative Literature Commons](#), and the [Critical and Cultural Studies Commons](#)

Dedicated to the dissemination of scholarly and professional information, **Purdue University Press** selects, develops, and distributes quality resources in several key subject areas for which its parent university is famous, including business, technology, health, veterinary medicine, and other selected disciplines in the humanities and sciences.

*CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture*, the peer-reviewed, full-text, and open-access learned journal in the humanities and social sciences, publishes new scholarship following tenets of the discipline of comparative literature and the field of cultural studies designated as "comparative cultural studies." Publications in the journal are indexed in the Annual Bibliography of English Language and Literature (Chadwyck-Healey), the Arts and Humanities Citation Index (Thomson Reuters ISI), the Humanities Index (Wilson), Humanities International Complete (EBSCO), the International Bibliography of the Modern Language Association of America, and Scopus (Elsevier). The journal is affiliated with the Purdue University Press monograph series of Books in Comparative Cultural Studies. Contact: [<clcweb@purdue.edu>](mailto:clcweb@purdue.edu)

### Recommended Citation

McAuliffe, Samantha L. "Autoethnography and Garcia's Dreaming in Cuban." *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 13.4 (2011): [<https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1874>](https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1874)

This text has been double-blind peer reviewed by 2+1 experts in the field.

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact [epubs@purdue.edu](mailto:epubs@purdue.edu) for additional information.

This is an Open Access journal. This means that it uses a funding model that does not charge readers or their institutions for access. Readers may freely read, download, copy, distribute, print, search, or link to the full texts of articles. This journal is covered under the [CC BY-NC-ND license](#).

*CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture*, the peer-reviewed, full-text, and open-access learned journal in the humanities and social sciences, publishes new scholarship following tenets of the discipline of comparative literature and the field of cultural studies designated as "comparative cultural studies." In addition to the publication of articles, the journal publishes review articles of scholarly books and publishes research material in its *Library Series*. Publications in the journal are indexed in the Annual Bibliography of English Language and Literature (Chadwyck-Healey), the Arts and Humanities Citation Index (Thomson Reuters ISI), the Humanities Index (Wilson), Humanities International Complete (EBSCO), the International Bibliography of the Modern Language Association of America, and Scopus (Elsevier). The journal is affiliated with the Purdue University Press monograph series of Books in Comparative Cultural Studies. Contact: <[clcweb@purdue.edu](mailto:clcweb@purdue.edu)>

---

**Volume 13 Issue 4 (December 2011) Article 11**  
**Samantha L. McAuliffe**  
**"Autoethnography and Garcia's *Dreaming in Cuban*"**  
<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol13/iss4/11>>

---

**Contents of *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 13.4 (2011)**  
<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol13/iss4/>>

---

**Abstract:** In her article "Autoethnography and Garcia's *Dreaming in Cuban*" Samantha L. McAuliffe positions Cristina Garcia's novel as a text of self-discovery and cultural reconciliation. McAuliffe examines multilingualism and hybridity in *Dreaming in Cuban* and postulates that the novel represents what Marie Louise Pratt calls the "contact zone" where cultures meet and clash. As autoethnography, *Dreaming in Cuban* allows an insider view of what being Cuban American really means. The reader is able to experience the conflict those with a hybrid identity experience through the eyes of one in the midst of that conflict. Further, McAuliffe suggests in her analysis that there is evidence that Garcia herself is able to reconcile issues of culture and identity through the writing of the novel.

**Samantha L. McAULIFFE**

### **Autoethnography and Garcia's *Dreaming in Cuban***

Autoethnography is fascinating because it affords the reader a unique window into the lives of those members of society considered to be outside of the main stream. By definition, autoethnography is writing that is undertaken by the other to confront perceptions created through representations that the majority has made of them. It is a type of writing that tells the story from the point of view of those who experienced it. In "Arts of the Contact Zone," Mary Louise Pratt positions autoethnography as a practice of the "contact zone." She describes contact zones as "social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths" (34). The clashing and mixing of cultures create the conditions for an autoethnographic text to be produced. Pratt's theory of autoethnography as a literary form is a relatively new theory. However, autoethnography itself has existed for hundreds of years.

Previously, autoethnography has been viewed mostly as a sociological methodology. Based on the condition that autoethnography is a cultural study, it is easy to see why it has operated as an extension of the sociological research method, ethnography. Unlike autoethnography, literary ethnographies are texts written to rationalize or justify the colonization and oppression of others. A sociological theory of ethnography is a method of studying a culture other than one's own by immersing oneself within that culture and writing about what one discovers throughout that process. Mary Reda explains that autoethnography has grown out of the ethnographic research methodology but, in literary terms, autoethnography and ethnography are very different. A researcher hoping to write an ethnography must study "the history, participants, and language of a community" in order to understand the cultural group (178). Reda cites Beverly Moss, who warns that there are problems within an ethnographic project. Moss warns against "ethnocentrism and other baggage" acknowledging the limited role of the researcher in understanding and interpreting the culture being researched. Reda calls this the insider/outsider dynamic in which "the researcher must be both 'insider' and 'outsider' to the culture she explores. The researcher must be both within and distinct from the community to adequately conceptualize that culture" (Moss qtd. in Reda 178). Autoethnography is then different from ethnography in this way. Whereas ethnographers write to represent and speak for a specific, often minority, group, autoethnographers are members of those groups telling their own stories. Literary autoethnography cannot be used to study culture the way sociological ethnographies can.

Autoethnography negates the insider/outsider dynamic because the authors are themselves parts of the communities of which they are writing. They are insiders commenting on representations others have made of them. Reda refers to Lionnet who offers a sociological definition of autoethnography and asserts that autoethnography "opens up a space of resistance between the individual (-auto-) and the collective (-ethno-) where the writing (-graphy-) of resistance can not be foreclosed" (Lionnet qtd. in Reda 178). Reda sees Pratt's definition as an expansion of Lionnet's definition and argues that Pratt takes autoethnography a step further. Although it is true that autoethnography can be utilized by sociologists to study culture and relationships between cultures, it can also be utilized as a literary rhetorical method. If autoethnography is viewed through a postcolonial critical lens as a product of the contact zone, it can be written by members of communities that have been colonized or by immigrants. How then does autoethnography move from research methodology and its association with ethnography to that of a literary genre? Richard van Ort writes that a text is something which "invite[s] interpretation" and interpretation is "the symbolic process whereby we translate the significance of one thing by seeing it in terms of another ... this irreducible anthropological fact explains the current preoccupation in literary studies with culture as an object of general symbolic interpretation. For if humanity is defined as the culture-using animal, and if culture is defined as that object which invites symbolic interpretation, then it follows that literary studies stands at the center of an anthropology founded on these assumptions" (621). van Ort draws an interesting parallel that helps to close the gap between autoethnography as a sociological tool and autoethnography as a literary tool. Text and culture both invite interpretation. Literary studies produce texts that should be interpreted; therefore, literature should and can explore culture. Literature can afford the readers with an inside look into a culture other than their own: "the point of reading literature is to discover the deeper signifi-

cance of culture" (van Ort 621). If we apply van Ort's theories to autoethnography, it can be argued that autoethnography allows for a deeper understanding of culture and cultural evolution. By studying autoethnography, readers are able to gain an understanding of the social pressures that contribute to changes in culture and formations of new cultures.

Although much debate has raged over the credibility of autoethnographies versus ethnographies as anthropological study, I would like to examine autoethnography as a literary style. I argue that autoethnography is the product of what Pratt calls "the contact zone," or the place where cultures meet and clash. Because contact zones are the meeting places of cultures, they are also points of exchange. I argue that a contact zone is not only the site for the meeting of cultures but also for the mixing of cultures. Through these exchanges and mixes we see a springing forth of hybrid cultures and in some cases the evolution of new cultures. When cultures clash, the atmosphere is ripe for the loss and gain of cultural heritage. Language, food, ideals, myths, folklore, religion, and other aspects of culture are passed, adopted, adapted, and shared. Identities are befuddled and the conquered is often left to assemble the pieces of their new hybrid identity. Autoethnography is a means for writers and readers to discover themselves by exploring their own culture and experiences through their writing. Pratt states that much of autoethnography is written using more than one language. This multilingualism can be attributed to the fact that autoethnographies are products of the contact zone. Autoethnographers weave idioms of the conqueror in with indigenous idioms to create self-representations in an attempt to intervene in the conqueror's forms of understanding. The idea is to address both the minority audience and the metropolitan or majority audience. One way to ensure that both audiences are addressed is to use a combination of the majority and minority languages. This combination will "construct a parodic, oppositional representation of the conqueror's own speech" (Pratt 35). Pratt uses the word "parodic" to describe the way in which the conqueror's speech is represented. She is referring to the restructuring of the conqueror's language, such as changing the meanings of words, structures of sentences, and adapting the English words to native rhythms and structures in writing. Autoethnography also works backwards, providing a bridge for members of a hybrid culture between all aspects of their identity and Garcia's *Dreaming in Cuban* is a novel in which such hybrid cultural identity is narrated. Throughout the novel, language serves as a connection to the native culture and as a reminder of the characters' cultural heritage. Language also serves as a figurative hyphen between the two parts of the hybrid culture and this mixture allows the culture to evolve and progress, forging new identities or ways of thinking about the hybrid group. This is the place where self-hatred and oppression can be stripped away in an effort to remind people of who they were before being conquered or before becoming the "other."

Garcia's novel follows the experiences of Cubans who were exiled during the Cuban revolution. Politics and distance separated many families. Isabel Alvarez-Borland has called *Dreaming in Cuban* an autobiography because it is linked to Garcia's personal identity. Like Pilar, the story's protagonist, Garcia came to the United States from Cuba as a small child. A return trip to Cuba in 1984 caused her to become interested in her identity and larger questions of history and politics. Yet, while many of Pilar's experiences in the novel mirror the experiences of Garcia and were somewhat based on Garcia's own life, I do not agree that this text is autobiographical. Although there are scenarios described within this work that are similar to those Garcia has experienced, they are only reminiscent of her life. Garcia did not mean for *Dreaming in Cuban* to be read as an autobiography. The themes and issues can be applied much more broadly than only to Garcia's life. I postulate that Garcia's novel is autoethnographic because its themes can be applied not only to Garcia but to Cuban Americans in general.

By defining Garcia's work as autobiography, Alvarez-Borland removes *Dreaming in Cuban's* ability to speak to an entire group of people and instigate self discovery by not only the author but also the reader. Although Alvarez-Borland's terminology in my opinion is wrong, her observations about the novel are correct. She asserts that this work is significant because it tells the experiences of the exiled from the perspective of the ethnic writer (44). Without knowing it, Alvarez-Borland has helped to solidify my claim that *Dreaming in Cuban* is autoethnographic in observing that the story of the exiled or "other" is being told through the eyes of the "other." She also makes several other connections that help to substantiate my claim: she compares Garcia to Pablo Medina and Omar Torres and calls these three writers of Cuban heritage "representative of a pivotal moment in contemporary Cuban-American

writing. They are effecting the transition from émigré/exile to members of the ethnic minority" (43). These three writers are embarking on a new style of Cuban-American writing ushering in a different cultural perspective. Katherine Payant cites Pérez Firmat who asserts that Garcia cannot be defined as an exile because she grew up in America. This claim would be consistent with Alvarez-Borland's claim, that her writing does not focus on the issues of exiles but the issues of forming a new identity as an ethnic minority, in this case, Cuban-American.

Garcia's work explores the issues of cultural hybridity and how a hyphenated existence complicates identity. As Alvarez-Borland points out in her essay, "Cuban-American writers face two challenges: how to reconcile their past experiences in their country of birth with present experiences in their adopted country [and] how to navigate between bicultural and monocultural readers" (43). This observation clearly shows the challenges faced by all writers of autoethnography. Writers must reconcile two cultures: their culture of origin and the culture of their adopted home, just as Alvarez-Borland states. Authors must also learn how to appeal to readers from both their home culture, those like them who are bicultural and those who are members of the new culture. This appeal will aid in opening up a dialogue between the communities. This work qualifies as autoethnography through its basis on historical fact, the use of a member of the minority community as the narrator, and through the "insider" view of what it means to be Cuban-American forging a new identity. Through the stories of three generations of Cuban women, Celia, Lourdes, and Pilar, Garcia creates a dialectical movement toward an autoethnographic creation of Cuban Americanness. Each woman's point of view is an important variable to the formation of the hybrid culture. These stylistic contributions include telling the story from the perspective of three generations of Cuban women, the mixing of languages, and the mixing of magical realism with realism.

Garcia tells a story of Cubans who have chosen to leave their native country during the Cuban Revolution through the voices of three generations of women. The choice to allow three perspectives to be presented in the novel gives Garcia a unique opportunity to form a dialogue among the three women's opinions and experiences. This dialogue is a distinctive characteristic of autoethnography as it allows for the exploration of events and personal views from the culture. The matriarch of the family, Abuela Celia, is a staunch supporter of El Lider and the Cuban Revolution. Her voice represents the voice of Cuba, full of tradition and patriotism. In fact, the novel opens with a description of Celia "guarding the north coast of Cuba" (3). For all of her patriotism and fulfillment she finds in working for the revolution, Celia understands that the revolution has torn her family apart: "Celia cannot decide which is worse, separation or death. Separation is familiar, too familiar, but Celia is uncertain she can reconcile it with permanence. Who could have predicted her life? What unknown covenants led her ultimately to this beach and this hour and this solitude?" (6). This quote begins the novel's theme of separation. Using Celia as the character to articulate these ideas is an interesting choice. Celia, the patriotic Cuban, towards the end of her life allows herself to reconcile the fact that El Lider's revolution will "cause her husband to be buried in stiff foreign earth. Because of this their children and their grandchildren are nomads" (6-7). Celia's family has been separated because of their political affiliations. Because of their difference in opinion, Celia has been exiled from the rest of her family and forced to be separate from them. This separation between families was common during this time period. Many Cuban family members found themselves on opposite sides of the political issue. Just as in the American Civil War, families and friends became enemies.

Despite her patriotism, Celia's version of Cuba is balanced and Celia's story is told through her letters to a lost lover, Gustavo. She writes to him monthly and each letter tells of her life and political happenings of Cuba. She tells of war, homeless beggars, and children. Her letters depict entire families living on the street, people without jobs, and members of high society driving by all this without acknowledgement. By sprinkling these letters throughout the work, Garcia is creating a connection to Cuba. This connection is facilitated through language. Celia writes her letters using Spanish words and phrases. No other character throughout the novel uses Spanish to the extent that Celia does. Her use of the "native" language situates her as the closest person to her Cuban identity. Celia is the embodiment of Cuba itself. She is the authoritative voice of Cuban culture and through her eyes the reader, and as we will see Pilar, is able to gain an understanding of what it was like to be Cuban.

Although the letters are utilized by Garcia to demonstrate Celia's closeness not only to Cuba but also to her identity, there is another reason for these letters. It becomes clear in the last letter of the

novel that they were exercises in familial history and not necessarily to communicate her love to Gustavo. Celia was recording her family history so that it would not be forgotten. Often family histories are lost during the course of immigration. Immigrants lose touch with their country of origin. Celia wanted to be sure there was something that could tie her granddaughter, Pilar, back to her home country and identity. This is something unique to autoethnography. History can be written by those who experience it and not just those who conquer. For Celia, and it can be argued Garcia and all Cuban-Americans, it is important that family histories are passed down to younger generations. The passing of this information allows for the link between the country of origin and the new country to be created. This link is an autoethnographic moment where a hyphen is placed in the immigrants' identity, connecting the original culture to the new.

Lourdes, Celia's eldest daughter, offers a point of view different from her mother's. Lourdes is an expatriate who left Cuba with her husband, after their property was confiscated by the Revolutionaries. Lourdes "wants no part of Cuba, no part of its wretched carnival floats creaking with lies, no part of Cuba at all, which Lourdes claims never possessed her" (Garcia 73). She is extremely disdainful of Cuba and everything it stands for. Her sections of the novel focus on the injustices committed during the Revolution. Lourdes herself was brutally raped, beaten, and left for dead. She also suffered a miscarriage after being thrown from her horse in an effort to return home and help her husband secure their property. Although Lourdes professes her hatred for Cuba, there are instances where it seems she is nostalgic for the pieces of her identity that are connected with her homeland. She muses that "everything, it seems, is going south" (24). After her father dies she "imagines her father, too, heading south, returning home to their beach, which is mined with sad memories" (24). Lourdes's comment about her home being "mined with sad memories" (24) reminds us that while she is nostalgic for home, she is not ready to let go of the pain and sorrow Cuba has caused her. Because of this pain she turns away from Cuba and embraces her new country. The narrator explains that "immigration has redefined [Lourdes], and she is grateful. Unlike her husband, she welcomes her adopted language, its possibilities for reinvention" (73). Lourdes has embraced her new surroundings and is happy to reinvent herself and become someone different. Yet, instead of acknowledging her hybridity, she is only acknowledging her new American-ness. She describes her husband's difficulty with assimilating to American culture, stating that he "could not be transplanted" (129). This indicates that she is capable of transplanting herself and even thrives in her new environment. She also describes the women in his family who continue to cling to the lifestyle they knew in Cuba: "Cuban women of a certain age and a certain class consider working outside the home to be beneath them. But Lourdes never believed that" (130). She went immediately to work on her husband's ranch in Cuba and did not mind going to work in America while her husband stayed home. These aspects of Lourdes' story show her as a bit nostalgic for her home country but very receptive to her new culture. Through the eyes and experiences of Lourdes, we see a different side of Cuban immigration, the assimilation of Cubans to American culture.

The youngest voice in the narrative is that of Pilar, Lourdes's daughter and Celia's granddaughter. Pilar is symbolic of an interesting place where Cuban culture and American culture intersect. Although she is a first-generation Cuban-American, at the beginning of the novel Pilar associates herself more as a Cuban than an American. She explains that "even though I've been living in Brooklyn all my life, it doesn't feel like home to me. I'm not sure Cuba is, but I want to find out" (58). Alvarez-Borland points to this quote as being the central question of the novel: Pilar's and, it could be argued, all Cuban-Americans' search for identity. Pilar is interesting because she is the one character who is able to view Cuba with a fresh perspective. Although she strongly defines herself as a Cuban, as the previous quotation above proves, she has never experienced the Cuba of her family. Thus she cannot fully comprehend the political tensions between her mother and grandmother, and between her mother and Cuba itself. Her character provides the "outsider looking in" point of view. Firmat suggests that Pilar is the "character with the greatest ability to see the complexities of Cuban issues, of shades of gray" she claims that "Garcia's own hybrid generation [which Pilar represents] is most capable of achieving dialogue" because they are a mixture of both cultures and histories (Firmat qtd. in Payant 172). This new identity includes a unique multicultural awareness and a multilingualism: it is not only Cuban and not only US-American — it is Cuban American. Pilar is the personification of the meeting between two cultures, languages, and histories which forms something entirely new. Before Pilar, there were two options for Celia and Lourdes. These options were to embrace Cuba or to embrace America. Both women

chose opposite paths. Pilar, as we have already determined, was able to choose both. In so doing, she created a new identity for herself and others like her. Pilar's story allows for the full use of autoethnography to take place. It is the story of a fusion of cultures and identities and the sorting of parts. It moves beyond the ethnography of retelling history through those who really experienced it and tells of the experience of becoming a hybrid.

Multilingualism is often achieved through the mixing of dialects and languages within a text. It is the nexus between languages and, I argue, cultures. In "How Cristina Garcia Lost Her Accent, and Other Latina Conversations," Raphael Dalleo makes some very important points about the use of bilingual qualities within literature. Dalleo borrows Juan Flores's term "pan-ethnic" to describe *Dreaming in Cuban*. The term "pan-ethnic" implies that Garcia's novel spans three different cultures: Cuban, American, and Latin American. The novel has been created from the contact zones of these cultures. One example of the effect of these contact zones is Garcia's name. As Dalleo points out, on the cover of her first novel, *The Aguero Sisters*, Garcia's name is spelled with an accent mark over the "i." *Dreaming in Cuban*, however, shows Garcia's name spelled as I have it here, without diacritical mark. Dalleo asserts that the choice to spell her name differently on this novel was in "keeping with *Dreaming in Cuban's* overall orientation towards the United States, the author's project of 'losing' her accent and locating herself within the US framework" (3). Dalleo's assertion can be analyzed in two ways. The first analysis could determine that Garcia decided to "lose" her accent because she was "assimilating" to the U.S. culture. On the other hand, this loss can be seen as Garcia embracing her Cuban heritage and accepting that she is not just Cuban and not just US-American but Cuban American as perhaps Pilar does at the end of the novel. It could be argued that this personal growth for Garcia was achieved through the writing of the novel. That through the sharing of her cultural journey with others, she was able to find an identity within herself that she had not recognized before. This autoethnographic moment has not only affected readers of the novel but also the author.

Raphael Dalleo furthers the argument of hybridity in the novel by citing Maria Teresa Marrero, Alvarez-Borland, and Lori Ween all of whom discuss hybridity in *Dreaming in Cuban*. Indeed, Alvarez-Borland writes that the novel attempts to "reconcile two cultures and two languages and two visions of the world into a particular whole" (48), while Marrero states that the novel "deals with questions of acculturation and assimilation as a Hispanic in the United States" (Marrero qtd. in Dalleo 153) and Ween suggests that Garcia's novel is a "concerted effort to translate Cubanness into English" (139). Each of these scholars gives credence to the hybrid nature of Garcia's novel where characters attempt to identify themselves as Cuban-American and all that this identification means. The struggle that the novel depicts is a unique account of the personal struggle undertaken by Cuban Americans, and perhaps all people of a hybrid origin.

Ween's analysis addresses the translation of Cuban culture to English and the translation she mentions is exemplified in the bilingual quality of Garcia's novel. Bilingual textuality reveals the struggle between two cultures and explores what it means to be of a hybrid culture, or as Ween states, "translating Cubanness to English" (139). Garcia's *Dreaming in Cuban* is a bilingual, autoethnographic text, where characters grapple with the meaning of membership in a hybrid culture. Spanish words are interspersed with English in the dialogues and much of the Spanish terminology used is in dialogue between the characters who are still in Cuba: Celia, Felicia, and Hermina. At times Lourdes and Pilar use Spanish but never to the extent that the characters located in Cuba do. Moreover, Celia is depicted as the most fluent of all of the characters and both her dialogue and her musings are in Spanish. As mentioned previously, Celia and the other characters located in Cuba are portrayed as being closer to their Cuban identity and this closeness is shown in their use of Spanish. Celia's sections of the novel also contain something else very unique. Often passages of poetry intermingle with the prose. This poetry, mostly written in Spanish, contains the recognizable rhythms of Latin poetry. The structure of the poetry is reminiscent of Latin American literature. This is another strong link between Celia and her Cuban identity. No other characters write using poetry. Furthermore, Celia's letters begin with Spanish endearments. These terminologies do not allow the reader to forget that the characters are parts of a hybrid culture whether they wish to be a part of one or not. The use of Latin rhythms and poetic styles coupled with the traditional prose style of narrative fuses the Cuban culture with the American culture. The Spanish language and poetry paired with Pilar's prose bridges the divide between Cuba and America.

The last section of the novel, "Languages Lost," shows a shift in narrative style. The title of this section tells the reader that something has changed and that something has been lost. Although Garcia's characters are now located in Cuba, the story seems to have lost its Cubanness. As Dalleo describes it, "the magical disappears from the plot, Garcia's style shifts away from the poetry and magic associated with Cuba to the entirely realistic style of its final scene. The stylistic accent typical of Sandra Cisneros, this overtly hybrid narrative voice, gives way to Cristina Garcia's own voice, a journalistic prose" (10). This shift of language and writing style which Dalleo describes supports the bilingual nature of this text and establishes the shift in Pilar's thinking and understanding about Cuba. She is finally exposed to the harsh realities of living in Cuba during the political unrest that is taking place. Instead of the magical paradise Pilar imagined Cuba to be, she finds a country caught in a civil war. The final scene of the novel depicts a mass migration of people from Cuba and Pilar's cousin is one of the people who is able to escape with the help of Pilar and Lourdes.

It could be argued that for Lourdes perhaps the opposite happens: she is able to confront her past and begin the process of healing and hybridization and accept her bilingualism. Lourdes attempts to block Cuba out of her memory and only remembers Cuba frozen in time as 1959. Although she tells her family that she wants nothing to do with Cuba, we see that the exile has affected her: Lourdes "ponders the transigrations from the southern latitudes, the millions moving north. What happens to their languages? The warm burial grounds they leave behind? What of their passions lying stiff and untranslated in their breasts" (73). Alvarez-Borland points to this passage as an indication that Lourdes is thinking about her own exile and her own language being lost or left behind. This is an interesting directional shift from her earlier musings about southern migration. She is now feeling a yearning for the Cuba she is preparing to leave behind and a healing has taken place. Upon her return to Cuba, Payant points to Lourdes caring for her mother, her return to the ranch where she was raped, and her entering the Peruvian embassy all as signs of her healing process (171). She also cites the description of Lourdes dancing the congo as an acceptance of her Cubanness. As she begins to dance, "her body remembered what her mind had forgotten. Suddenly, she wanted to show her daughter the artistry of true dancing" (224). Earlier in this passage, Lourdes situates herself as Cuban and her daughter as US-American as she watches Pilar dance. Lourdes comments that "she dances like an American" (224). At this moment Lourdes has seen her daughter as something she is perhaps not, a US-American. She embraces the fact that she is Cuban and she also embraces certain aspects of her culture: dance. Payant gains evidence of Lourdes's acceptance of her Cuban heritage through her identification as Cuban and her daughter as American and the beginning stages of healing that take place upon her return to Cuba.

Pilar's trip to Cuba solidifies her identity. She begins dreaming in Spanish which, in a way, is a language gained; however, she realizes that "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" (36). Pilar sees that although she is part Cuban, she is also part US-American and although New York did not feel like "home," it is a large part of who she is. Dalleo suggests that Pilar's decision "to leave [is due to the fact that] she thinks that staying in Cuba is to limit herself: as she thinks of it, to choose Cuba, she would be choosing to be Cuban, but to choose the United States, she chooses to be Cuban and American" — to be bilingual (11). Pilar has been able to see for herself the political unrest of Cuba and the harsh realities that exist there. Through this encounter, she comes to grips with her cultural identity and decides how to express her Cubanness. Pilar tells the reader that she has "started dreaming in Spanish, which has never happened before. I wake up feeling different, like something inside me is changing, something chemical and irreversible" (235). This is an example of a language gained, but it is also an autoethnographic moment. The moment Pilar begins to dream in Spanish she has taken on a new aspect of her identity. It can be argued that she has rediscovered who she is culturally. The Cuban side of her has fused with her US-American side.

Language usage is not the only way a text can achieve multilingualism. As Dalleo points out, the text is bilingual not only in language but in the use of this hybrid textual style: "*Dreaming in Cuban* begins with this mixed-hybrid style, less in its language than in its multiple allusions to events going beyond the rational and the ordinary" (10). Magical realism is employed extensively in the first two sections of the novel. This literary device is a writing style associated with Latin-American literature and "rooted in Latin culture" (Caminero-Santangelo 140). Magical realism became the main genre for

Latin American authors in the 1960s and 1970s during what has been termed as the "Latin American Boom." In "Hermeneutics of Vagueness: Magical Realism in Current Literary Critical Discourse," Christopher Warnes sets out five criteria for narratives to meet classification as magical realist texts. These include an irreducible element of magic, the descriptions in magical realism must detail a strong presence of the phenomenal, the reader often experiences some doubts in attempting to reconcile two contradictory understandings of events, the narrative merges the magical with the real, and it disturbs conventional ideas about time, space, and identity (6). However, he believes that only the first two are crucial to qualifying as magical realism. Dalleo believes that *Dreaming in Cuban* qualifies as a magical realist text. There are identifiable elements of magical realism throughout the novel, for instance Pilar and Celia have the ability to communicate with one another telepathically. Celia talks to Pilar about Cuba: "I hear her speaking to me at night just before I fall asleep. She tells me stories about her life and what the sea was like that day. She seems to know everything that's happened to me and tells me not to mind my mother too much" (28-29). Lourdes also has a special approach to communication with her deceased father, who returns after death to help Lourdes renew relationships with both her mother and her daughter. Magical realism often enables "Latin American writers to explore questions of cultural identity in sophisticated ways" (6), writes Warnes, and Garcia's decision to infuse this style into her novel underscores it as a true work of Cuban literature. This Latin style of magical realism is fused with the traditional realist style of writing in the final section of the novel where her writing shifts to what Dalleo calls a "journalistic" technique creating a bilingual narrative. The fusion of these two styles is yet another indication of the progression of culture. Garcia's work is both Latin and US-American through her use of styles common to both cultures. This hybridity also qualifies her work as autoethnography. Pratt asserts that to qualify as autoethnography, a text must be what she has termed "bilingual." Bilingualism or multilingualism do not only refer to language. They can also refer to the mixing of cultures and writing styles.

In conclusion, by utilizing magical realism, Garcia has created a significant link to Latin America. Although the magical realist ties are weak, Garcia has implemented them to remind the reader of her characters, and perhaps her own, Latin roots. Garcia's *Dreaming in Cuban* — through the use of multiple languages, different stylistic devices, and various points of view — shows the creation of a hybrid culture. Through the stories and experiences of three women we are able to join them in a journey of self-discovery. There are many autoethnographic moments throughout the work: Pilar connecting to her ancestry, Lourdes's beginning stages of healing leading to a reconnect between she and her family as well as her culture, and the use of magical realism. Through the narratives of three generations of Cuban women, Garcia has mimicked the progression of culture that autoethnography is able to show and thus what Garcia has created in *Dreaming in Cuban* is a Cuban American state of mind.

### Works Cited

- Alvarez-Borland, Isabel. "Displacements and Autobiography in Cuban-American Fiction." *World Literature Today* 68.1 (1994): 43-49.
- Caminero-Santangelo, Marta. *On Latinidad: U.S. Latino Literature and the Construction of Ethnicity*. Gainesville: UP of Florida, 2007.
- Dalleo, Raphael. "How Cristina Garcia Lost Her Accent, and Other Latina Conversations." *Latino Studies* 3.1 (2005): 3-18.
- Flores, Juan. *From Bomba to Hip-Hop: Puerto Rican Culture and Latino Identity*. New York: Columbia UP, 2000.
- Garcia, Cristina. *Dreaming in Cuban*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1992.
- Lionnet, Françoise. "Autoethnography: The An-Archic Style of Dust Tracks on a Road." *Reading Black, Reading Feminist*. Ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. New York: Meridian, 1990. 382-414.
- Marrero, Maria Teresa. "Historical and Literary Santería: Unveiling Gender and Identity in U.S. Cuban Literature." *Tropicalizations: Transcultural Representations of Latinidad*. Ed. Frances Aparicio and Susana Chavez-Silverman. Hanover: UP of New England, 1997. 139-59.
- Moss, Beverly. "Ethnography and Composition: Studying Language at Home." *Methods and Methodology in Composition Research*. Ed. Gesa Kirsch and Patricia Sullivan. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1992. 153-71.
- Payant, Katherine. "Alienation to Reconciliation in the Novels of Cristina Garcia." *MELUS: The Study for the Society of the Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States* 26.3 (2001): 163-82.
- Peréz Firmat, Gustavo. *Life won the Hyphen: The Cuban-American Way of Life*. Austin: U of Texas P, 1994.
- Pratt, Mary Louise. "Arts of the Contact Zone." *Profession* 91 (1991): 33-40.
- Reda, Mary. "Autoethnography as Research Methodology." *Academic Exchange Quarterly* 11.1 (2007): 177-83.
- van Ort, Richard. "The Critic as Ethnographer." *New Literary History* 35.4 (2004): 621-61.
- Warnes, Christopher. "Hermeneutics of Vagueness: Magical Realism in Current Literary Critical Discourse." *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 41.1 (2005): 1-13.

Ween, Lori. "Translational Backformations: Authenticity and Languages in Cuban American Literature." *Comparative Literary Studies* 40.2 (2003): 127-41.

Author's profile: Samantha L. McAuliffe works in the office of the Vice Chancellor for Human Resources at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She has taught first-year courses in the humanities and served as a first-year academic advisor. McAuliffe's fields of interest in research include comparative literature and cultural studies, multicultural literature, and educational issues. E-mail: <[samantha.mcauliffe@unc.edu](mailto:samantha.mcauliffe@unc.edu)>