

Hatty Gardner

Professor Sriya Shrestha

HCOM 335: American Ethnic Lit & Culture

28 April 2017

Close Reading 4: *The House on Mango Street*

“One day I will pack my bags of books and paper. One day I will say goodbye to Mango. I am too strong for her to keep me here forever. One day I will go away” (Cisneros 110).

This passage really ties into the themes in *The House on Mango Street* of self-discovery and self-determination. It is particularly significant in its finality, as it occurs in the very last chapter of the book, “Mango Says Goodbye Sometimes.” It represents the culmination of the character development of the narrator, Esperanza, a young girl who throughout the book struggles with discovering and defining who she is and longs for more than Mango Street. Whereas in previous chapters Esperanza laments about her name and struggles with finding a place among her age mates who are all casually sexist in a way that offends her, here she herself proclaims she is “too strong for [Mango] to keep me here forever” (Cisneros 110). The self-declaration is in an indication of self-confidence in her ability to do what she has always wished to, which is to rise above Mango Street and be a writer. By the end of the novel, this passage shows that Esperanza has a sense of who she is.

The repetition of the phrase “One day I will...” at the beginning of three of the four sentences also really drives home Esperanza’s strength of character, which she has discovered in herself throughout the novel. “One day I will...” is not a statement which indicates self-doubt, Esperanza firmly believes she “will say goodbye to Mango”; she doesn’t hope, she doesn’t think

she will, she *will*. That is a powerful statement filled with self-determination. The fact that it is repeated three times lends Esperanza's statements even more power.

In many ways Esperanza is similar to the protagonist Phuong in "Fatherland" by Viet Thanh Nguyen. Both young women seek to one day leave their circumstances and determine their own destinies. They don't want and eventually discover the strength of character to not *let* the circumstances they grew up in determine the entire course of their lives; they want to be their own people. In the closing arc of "Fatherland" after Phuong contemplates telling her father that one day she would leave, she states about her goals, "[it] was merely a matter of momentum, and she now knew how to begin" (Nguyen 15). Just like Esperanza, Phuong no longer wants to leave, she *will* leave, and she knows how to do it. Both young women have discovered the strength to determine who they are and what they will do within themselves, in spite of their difficult circumstances.

## Works Cited

Cisneros, Sandra. *The House on Mango Street*. New York: Vintage Contemporaries, 1991. Print.

Nguyen, Viet Thanh. "Fatherland." *NarrativeMagazine.com*, 2011. Web.