
Retelling as Homecoming: Navigating Cultural Locations in Julia Alvarez's *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* and *Yo!*

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Abstract

Diasporic and transnational writings by Latina writers share the tropes of travel, journey, and border-crossing. These literary texts trace a genealogy; they establish points of references between which they move back and forth, physically and/or mentally and/or spiritually: between their respective homeland – the Dominican Republic, Mexico, Cuba, Puerto Rico – and the mainland United States (Heredia 2009 3). As part of the larger tradition of diasporic writing, Latinas explore the question of identity formation, which constantly sways between assimilation and the contestation of the very mechanisms of assimilation in the US culture. Literature acts for them as a process of self-invention, reinvention, as well as a means of externalizing one's thoughts, feelings, dilemmas or traumas and helping one to come to terms with places, people and the self. In this essay I take my cue from Julia Alvarez's novels *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accent* and *Yo!* to examine the themes of identity, family, and cultural divides that arise from the diasporic experience. The notion of cultural identity is a fluid concept that allows elasticity of meaning as it cuts across time and space. Drawing on Stuart Hall's theory of cultural identity formation, I analyze the questions that the novels raise in regards to the character's perceptions of themselves, as they find themselves standing at the crossing of two different cultures.

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