

*Madres e Hijas*. de Laura Freixas, ed. Barcelona: Anagrama, 1996. (236 páginas.)

*Madres e Hijas* (ed. Laura Freixas 1996) epitomises in the field of literature the current interest in Spain both in theorising women's experiences and in offering alternative literary models of representation. In the introduction Freixas contextualises the relation of such a compilation within the area of Women's Studies in English and French scholarship and emphasises the need for literature by Spanish female writers which would voice the similarities and differences of women's experiences in Spain. Through the different stories the reader is offered the possibility of exploring varied views of the experience of mothering that go from the representation of such an experience either as fatal or uplifting but frightening to a declaration of love between a mother and a daughter, passing through analyses and criticisms of current and past social values. The texts echo the contemporary focus in women's writing for reflecting upon the cultural, social and historical constraints which affect and conform the experience of motherhood and daughterhood and its representation in the arts and media.

The contributions to the volume originate from the pen of different generations of Spanish women writers ranging from Rosa Chacel to Luisa Castro including a significant representation of female authorship represented by Carmen Laforet, Carmen Martín Gaité, Ana María Matute, Josefina R. Aldecoa, Esther Tusquets, Ana María Moix, Soledad Puértolas, Clara Sánchez, Paloma Díaz-Mas, Mercedes Soriano y Almudena Grandes. The widely known Cristina Peri Rossi, Uruguayan author living in Spain and nationalised Spanish, also participates in this compilation of fourteen short stories. Each of them is preceded by a brief biographical sketch. The majority of the texts are new except "De su ventana a la mía" (Martín Gaité), "Chinina Mingone" (Chacel), "Al colegio" (Laforet) and "Cuaderno para cuentas" (Matute) which have appeared previously in other volumes of their respective authors.

The different narratives deal with the experience of motherhood, or *daughterhood*, in a variety of contexts thus offering a wide scope of feminine perspectives. These constitute innovative readings of the mother-daughter relationship if we compare them with the reductionist construction of motherhood promoted by the patriarchal order, in general, and by traditional images of ideal femininity exploited by the State and the Church during the Francoist dictatorship, in particular. The portrayal of the female experiences goes from a love declaration like in "Primer Amor" (Peri Rossi), to a terrifying experience of dependence like in "La niña sin alas" (Díaz-Mas) or in "La buena hija" (Grandes), without forgetting to tackle the

themes of female bonding, familiar misconceptions and misunderstandings, the ambiguity of feelings that such an experience may arise, the image of the mother as a Gordian knot and the tearing apart of reality when one of the two components of the mother-daughter dyad disappears. Thus, although one finds familiar themes of mothering as a repressive experience, in viewing the texts from a historically informed perspective along with radically critical readings of patriarchally established stereotypes, they do create alternative spaces in which to comprehend and/or project the un/certainties and ambi/valences of the dyad.

The voicing of experience is also diverse since the narrative voice of the different stories moves from the daughter's to the mother's and viceversa. Therefore in some stories the reader is offered the possibility to explore how the *I* and *you* of the discourse are subverted enabling mothers and daughters to identify with the *other's* position without losing their own identity. The texts create a dialogue between mothers and daughters who, in several instances, and despite culturally imposed constraints on their bodies, manage to build a bridge which allows them to negotiate in a creative and constructive way their own different identities without rejecting nor repressing each other. However, in other cases the narrative compels the reader to participate in an angelical but terrific tale or a distant recollection of unreciprocated desire with un/expected consequences. In any case, the experience of reading it is very stimulating, to say the least, and this specific female reader recommends it. The book, by its attempt to desarticulate patriarchally established stereotypes and attempt to work within/against their limits, offers not only a site for feminist resistance but also provides readers an alternative representation to the *official* construction of motherhood. It opens tangential doors to explore the complexities of such construction and the strategies for its subversion which will help us to re-create and re-discover *other* ways of mothering.

**María José Gámez Fuentes**