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THE NATURAL EXILE: A STUDY OF TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY CUBAN-AMERICAN
NARRATIVES FOCUSING ON THE ELDERLY'S PLIGHT

by
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B. A. Florida International University, 2017

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
in the Department of English
in the College of Arts and Humanities
at the University of Central Florida
Orlando, Florida

Summer Term
2019

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ABSTRACT

Developed from the similarity between exile theory and age studies, the term “exile” is expanded to a natural form of exile because of the shocking temporal shift that reconstructs social interaction, familial dynamics, and the aging body. Using Heidegger’s theoretical work *Being in Time*, Simon de Beauvoir’s *The Coming of Age*, and Jean Améry’s *On Aging* as insight, this literary analysis captures how the elderly protagonists Goyo from Cristina García’s *King of Cuba*, Máximo from Ana Menéndez’s “In Cuba I was a German Shepherd,” and Soledad from Cecilia Rodríguez Milanés’s “Abuela Marielita” experience a natural exile among society, their family and within their own body. These areas express how the elderly’s sense of displacement equates that of a political/geographical exile.

To God – who reminded me to have faith greater than my fears

To Joshua – who supported me throughout each late night and tear

To Mi Familia – who loved me and took an interest in this thesis

To my baby girl – who I've yet to see, but inspired me to do more than I thought possible

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Cecilia Rodriguez Milanés for the countless meetings, support and laughs throughout this entire process – without such guidance, I would not have been able to continue. Your love for Cuban-American literature has extended my reading list. Dr. Logan and Nwakanma have stuck through this process and offered great leads on sources. Dr. Kenneth Johnson, if I never took your summer literature course on the depictions of the elderly, I would never have found my passion for studying the elderly’s plight. Thank you for being the first to show me how to look deeper and go further in my writing. I look forward to teach others as you all do. Finally, I must thank my family and friends who have devoted countless hours reviewing and hearing my thesis for a longer time than is suitable. My Cuban mother, grandma, and tias have been a source that has taught me there is something special about the Cuban exile – this is for you.

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CHAPTER 1: THE NATURAL EXILE

The word “exile” may evoke strong feelings of banishment, disharmony and rejection for those individuals who suffer such loss, but for those who meet exile through literature, the term may not be quite as daunting. Exilic literature allows the reader to enter an unfamiliar space, and although the reader may never understand the gravity of loss, the narratives engage and portray harsh images of individual displacement and fragmentation. For stories that follow elderly protagonists, the issues of identity are also prevalent and can double a person’s identity. Among many twenty-first century Cuban-American exile narratives that focus on political/geographic exile, Cristina García’s *King of Cuba*, Ana Menéndez’s “In Cuba I was a German Shepherd,” and Cecilia Rodríguez Milanés’s “Abuela Marielita” further the discussion of exile literature because their protagonists are elderly. Not only do the authors expound upon the characters’ experience as Cuban exiles, but they also include language that describes the isolation and turmoil age forces on one’s identity. García’s Goyo, Menéndez’s Máximo, and Rodríguez Milanés’s Soledad all carry the weight of an aging exile, and it can affect them differently. By analyzing these aging Cuban exile characters, I aim to define age as a natural form of exile.

Focusing on Martin Heidegger's being theory, Alejandro Vallega’s connection between exile and space, Andre Aciman's portrayal of political exile, and Simone De Beauvoir and Jean Améry's diverse theories of age, I will examine how each level of exile – social, familial, and the body itself – all force these protagonists into the familiar territory of exile. These levels directly influence the aging exile’s identity from different spaces that compose and enforce one’s identity. The social sphere is the farthest one from the exile, but it makes up their lived space, so they cannot avoid its impact. The next sphere is the immediate family relationships and the

changing past and present roles each member inhabits. The final sphere revolves around the elderly whose body image and abilities change. Each author explores these spheres to different degrees, and the characters react to their exiled status uniquely. Instead of focusing my literary analysis on the protagonist's ties to Cuba, I will be characterizing how each author negotiates these spheres which exile the aging character's existence or as Heidegger references it, their *Dasein*.

In the second chapter, I will be expounding on passages that refer to the first sphere surrounding the social stratum. Our exiles are socially idealized which can limit the elderly person's identity to an object that is either a sage or mentally insane. Fixed on this view, society continues to place the aged in exile because they are seen without potential and have no more to offer the community. Finally, the elderly are internally displaced by the quickly changing social customs and generational differences. This leaves the aged to reminisce about a time which was familiar, just as political exiles do about their native land while sitting in their adoptive country.

In the third chapter, interactions among the immediate family and descriptions of the aging body (the last two spheres) will be analyzed to express the displacement elderly people encounter. Largely due to a role reversal, time forces the protagonist to feel exiled around their family. When the child must start taking care of their parent, the aged quickly realize the dynamic change and usually reject it because it exiles their identity as provider and caregiver. If the exile still denies that form of displacement, their body's timeworn image and limited abilities bring the elderly to an inescapable place of exile. The elderly protagonists' image and function are heavily detailed throughout these narratives to remind the readers of the elderly's sense of displacement within themselves.

In the final chapter, I will tackle the literary references from *King of Cuba* and “In Cuba I was a German Shepherd” to show the inevitability of death. Faced with the protagonists’ past experiences and nearing death, what Heidegger references as an authentic being-toward-death, our oldest characters are the only ones who encounter this final stage of exile. These realizations are woven into the dialogue during moments of deep reflection and isolation, portraying the elderly’s exiled *Dasein*. From there I will conclude that age is a natural process for a completely unnatural state of existence. Through literary depictions of social, familial, and bodily changes, I will show how the elderly person’s *Dasein* is exiled because it must cope with what the individual knew and the changes each sphere represents. The representations of dislocation will be reestablished through the phenomenological, exile, and aging frameworks. As our protagonists exhibit, age will bring on its own natural exile.

I chose to study these literary works because the stories transverse the common themes of political exile with the discomforts of aging. Of course, these Cuban-American narratives follow the major themes that hallmark exilic literature: longing for the homeland while negotiating cultural, geographical, and social differences within an adoptive country. Since the Cuban exile experience is relatively unique given the geographical location, historic interpretation, and political transactions, these exilic themes are widely used in Cuban-American stories. The community of real exiles who live in Miami, genuinely have a passion for Cuba and a clear vision of what it means to be an exile – not necessarily an immigrant. Cuban-American exiles struggle with permanent displacement because of the limited geographic space between where they formed their identity and where they must live after the revolution of ’59. No matter how long ago, Cuba is always only 90 miles away from America’s shore and serves as a reminder of their exiled status. Capturing the struggle Cubans face when negotiating a new identity in exile is

fertile ground for Cuban-American writers; however, the selected writers and narratives simultaneously evoke the emotional turmoil that pervades exile narratives and complicate it based on their descriptions and the protagonist's thoughts of aging. Surprisingly, Cuban-American novels rarely feature the protagonist as an elderly individual. For this reason, García, Menéndez and Rodríguez Milanés offer unique parallels between political/geographical exile and the natural exile. It is essential that both forms of exile are present. It expresses how the characters have learned to navigate their constant political/geographical exile, but their natural exile seems to be dealt with differently because it is a newer form of displacement. Each author represents the natural exile in their own dynamic stories, and this illuminates how age is its own displacement among diverse characters and ages.

The writers capture these narratives from personal experiences with family, their nationality, or culture. All share the same ethnicity and have lived in the same spaces their characters are drawn from. With this connection, Cuban born writer Cristina García usually writes about the conflicting cultures between America and Cuba while also intertwining family dynamics. Her most notable book, *Dreaming in Cuban* follows the conflict exile brings to three generations of female characters. While the abuela (grandmother) plays an important role in the narrative, she is not an exile, and the narration is shared among the other characters making age less relevant. Her more recent novel, *King of Cuba* only features elderly protagonists and dives into her version of old age in exile. She takes her time to frame old age as a miserable state. Unlike the other characters in the analysis, she allows Goyo to maintain a level of independence, his macho persona, and wealth. The reader is not as affected by the character's decaying body and social rejection because Goyo is prideful, delusional, and forceful throughout the novel. The language and imagery she uses to portray Goyo's natural exile suggests the inevitable demise

one's body will go through if they dare choose to live long enough. Conversely, Ana Menéndez's short story, "In Cuba I was in German Shepherd" details the horrors of natural exile. This story is the only work that characterizes an elderly protagonist in her book of the same title. Despite its smaller length, her short story emphasizes the social and emotional struggles a lonely Cuban exile would experience even amidst the Cuban exile diaspora of Miami. Although she uses humor around his domino community, Máximo's thoughts, memories, and scenes at home combine to reinforce that age is its own exile both mentally and physically. The reader is flung between laughter and empathy for the elderly exile because of the language and imagery Menéndez uses to paint old age. The previous two narratives focus on male Cuban exiles who came during the late 50s to early 60s, but Cecilia Rodríguez Milanés's work *Marielitos, Balseros and Other Exiles* offers a new insight from our only female elderly protagonist in her short story "Abuela Marielita." Although Soledad is not a part of the first wave of Cuban exiles and may not share the same ideological and cultural concerns Goyo and Máximo were transfixed on surrounding their political/geographical exile, Soledad still represents the same ideals of loss in exile and a fight to maintain her identity even when going through the onset of natural exile. Soledad's gender and age play an important role in portraying her as an elderly exile. Rodríguez-Milanés subtly represents how her protagonist deals with age as a Cuban woman. Since Soledad is the youngest character, the starker descriptions of old age are absent, but within the story Soledad's ignored traditions, elderly friends, neglectful family, and clear denial mark the early forms of natural exile. These authors created diverse stories that offer a broad spectrum of old age and a natural exile.

Literature Review

Cuban-American literature often explores political/geographical exile, so the literary criticisms follow this same strand. Literary scholars often analyze examples of political exile and its effect on the individual's interaction with oneself, one's memory and one's newly inhabited spaces. Depending on the task at hand, the writer may be analyzing a character's constant comparison between their past and their environment. Other scholars may look at the author's intentions for creating geographic spaces and places the characters inhabit. Still, others may focus on the historical implications between the pages and shine light on the exile's political turmoil as the main culprit. Although this research will not be focusing on the political/geographical exile, it is beneficial to note the analyses that acted as helpful guides to understanding natural exile because these same issues are taking place but from different causes.

These articles express an important way of viewing exilic literature. An example for an analysis focusing on creative choices in the literature, Jorge Duany's "Neither Golden Exile nor Dirty Worm: Ethnic Identity in Recent Cuban-American Novels" characterizes the fortunate Cuban exiles who achieved the American Dream and those who struggled to navigate American culture as a generalized form of the immigrant experience. His broad analysis suggests that recent novelists are focusing on general concepts of identity in the new country. While Duany's analysis offers a glimpse at the trending themes in Cuban-American narratives, Katherine B. Payant emphasizes author biographical influence in their stories. Her article, "From Alienation to Reconciliation in the Novels of Cristina García" forms a biographical reading for two of García's most popular novels based on the author's personal opinions concerning politics and the female voice. Payant emphasizes that authorial motivation and intent are key factors to interpret the language surrounding the female characters' identity struggles between Cuba and America. In Iraida H. López's article, "The Notion of 'Volver' in Cuban-American Memoirs: Gustavo Pérez

Firmat's 'Next Year in Cuba' as a Case of Mistaken Coordinates," she analyzes the Cuban diasporic tendency to create false memories and perpetuate idealized versions of their homeland. She asserts that their reconstructed present in the adoptive country infiltrates the true memories and prohibits the exile from ever returning to their pure memories. Based on her analysis, Cuban exiles' constant state of nostalgia romanticizes the original memory of their hometown and keeps the exile in a constant state of loss. Through a specifically political and national lens, these scholars have brought insight to Cuban exile narratives and identified causes for the turmoil this displaced diasporic group endures while living in America but dreaming about Cuba.

These literary analyses offer reasons and structure behind the language of Cuban-American exile narratives and showcase the difficulties of exile. One final literary analysis that deserves attention is Elana Gainor's dissertation on *The Space of Cuban American Exile Narratives: Places, Maps and Wayfinding*. Her work explores Cuban-American exilic literature and identifies strict geographic connections between the characters and their ties to Cuban and American identity and longing. She emphasizes that the close spatial relationship between Cuba and America – particularly those living in Miami – directly affect the exile's nostalgic propensity for their homeland and their mental frustration with their adoptive home. She asserts, "Exiles exist in two different realities: that of Cuba and that of exile" (Gainor 7). The Cubans remember their past and view their present at a discord with their national identity. This directly aligns with our elderly exiles. After years cultivating their second identity in America, their roots and spatial location still remind them of what they used to have – or now, incorrectly remember about their life in Cuba. Gainor's analysis offers a clear connection between the physical space and one's exiled identity. There is a similar connection between natural exile and our aging protagonists,

except Gainor looks at geographical space while I will be observing the exile of temporal space and its effect on one's identity.

Theoretical Framework

To situate my analysis, the previous articles all gave me valuable insight surrounding literary analysis for Cuban-American literature, but I needed broader frameworks to afford a clear method to discuss age as a natural form of exile. Since my goal is to expand the term for exile beyond the common political and geographic focus, I needed to understand exile theory beyond Cuban-American narratives. I found that exilic writers and theorists, like André Aciman, Nico Israel, Sophia McClennen, and Gustavo Pérez Firmat span a much broader scope than the selected literary scholars. Instead of focusing on all four notable theorists, André Aciman provides enough context and credentials to define exile studies. As an exile, literary critic, and novelist, he offers a view of exile which I will transfer to the aging Cuban-Americans in my chosen literary narratives. Aciman labels exile as an “unnatural” existence. Split between their homeland and their adoptive country, he insists that this forms a double identity that never allows the exile to experience home or to completely recreate a home elsewhere. According to Aciman, exile is the “unnatural” state where living in a foreign society, culture, and language leaves them feeling fragmented. He characterizes the general feelings of loneliness, displacement, and nostalgia in his book, *Letters of Transit*. Aciman further pronounces this unnatural state as a “compulsive inspection” and “permanent transients” (13). At all times, the exile is aware of their displacement. This exile scholar portrays the impact forced banishment has on one's identity regardless of the new home and its opportunities. The Cuban diaspora living in Miami is no different. The practical experiences and observations Aciman makes underscore an exile's

political, national and cultural ties to their homeland that influences their displacement anywhere.

To explore this assertion, one prominent Chilean exile and exile theorist, Alejandro Vallega emphasizes these similar exilic experiences through Martin Heidegger's theory of existential phenomenology – *Being in Time*. In his book, *Heidegger and the Issue of Space: Thinking on Exilic Grounds*, Vallega furthers exile studies beyond characterizing the exile as a person that has no homeland and consequently retains identity conflicts because of their environment. Instead of describing the exilic characteristics of loneliness and reaffirming an exile's sense of loss, he reengages Heidegger's theoretical work on someone's *Dasein* (being) and the impact of physical space on one's identity to explain the exile's predicament and sense of displacement in an adoptive land. An exile's *Dasein* is exposed to a life of alterity because the physical spaces the displaced person inhabits reject their association and reassert their foreignness. These foreign spaces, compounded by foreign languages, cultures, and traditions, keep the exile's essence in a constant state of alterity on some level. He asserts that Heidegger's work to understand what constructs and influences a person's *Dasein* is based on "concepts such as those of unchanging, ever-present roots, origins, ideas, essences, and principles, which supplant the being of entities at hand in their temporality, i.e., their perpetual change, contingency, and mortality (Vallega 5). If Heidegger bases his being theory on an individual's constant, unchanging situations then he leaves out an exile's completely unstable view of their environment. Vallega's attention between an exile's lost land and Heidegger's theory on the spatial impact of one's *Dasein* affords a clear catalyst for the exile's plagued identity.

Vallega's exilic adaptation of Heidegger's foundational work expresses how the exile can be othered in more ways than one. Since the exile's spatial world affects his or her sense of

being, temporal changes are also a factor in feeling exiled. Heidegger explains that one's *Dasein* is shaped in temporal moments – structures and events that shape identity. Even if one's identity is exiled, “Hopelessness, for example, does not tear *Dasein* away from its possibilities but is only an independent mode of being toward these possibilities” (Heidegger 236). While an exile may exist in loss, their being is still able to function in the world and retain other spatial connections that will affect their *Dasein*.

The key factors that impact our study for the aged exile would be Heidegger's potentiality-of-being and being-toward-death. These two terms bookend a person's *Dasein*. The first term describes a person's active potential at all moments, and the latter conveys their essence in the face of death and afterward. Speaking of a person's negative view of their potential, “Even when one is without illusions and ‘is ready for anything,’ the ‘ahead of itself’ is there. This structural factor of care tells us unambiguously that something is always still outstanding in *Dasein* which has not yet become ‘real’ as a potentiality-of-its-being” (Heidegger 236). The aged, whether they realize it or not, still have potential even when they live with the realization that death is inevitable. Understanding what shapes their *Dasein*, their constant potential, and their inevitable death offers a keen insight on understanding how the aged are naturally exiled through social encounters, family changes, and bodily disfunctions. Because the temporal and spatial aspects of our world directly affect and construct one's identity/ potential, the elderly develop an exiled existence. To truly situate the elderly's world and its immediate effects on their life, age theorists, Simone de Beauvoir and Jean Améry illuminate the struggles of an elderly person's *Dasein*.

The two leading theorists worked on their interpretation of age around the same time, Jean Améry published his work, *On Aging: Revolt and Resignation* in 1968, and Simone de

Beauvoir published *The Coming of Age* in 1970. These complementary works offer historic, social interactions depicting the elderly and case studies that characterize how the aging identity is influenced by society and within themselves. As Heidegger has described, an individual's *Dasein* is shared by the spaces they inhabit, and for the aged, they have lived long enough where their identities have been forged in their individual everydayness. "Everyday *Dasein* understands itself initially and for the most part, however, in terms of what it is accustomed to take care of. 'One is' what one does. With regard to this being (the everyday being-absorbed-with-one-another in the 'world' taken care of), representability is not only possible in general, but is even constitutive for being-with-one-another" (Heidegger 223). Essentially, the exile's identity is interdependent on the duties they occupy and the daily encounters they have. This explains how the elderly are greatly impacted by the simplest shift surrounding what they do and who they are around.

The everyday *Dasein* brings the aged to their first encounter with natural exile – social objectification and rejection. When the aged reach retirement age, their *Dasein* is shaken because they no longer engage in the same activities they have engaged for most of their life and can make them feel unneeded. De Beauvoir asserts that the elderly "belong to an unproductive minority, and their fate depended upon the interests of the active majority" (213). This active majority or the American society leaves the elderly to the wayside (intentionally or unintentionally) by sending them to nursing homes, creating elderly communities, or completely ignoring their traditions and thought. Being flung from an active member to an ignored one easily leaves the elderly to feel alone. Jean Améry suggests most bluntly that the elderly, "are as society prescribes: what they are, a nothing" (77). Even if the aged "pass the torch" willingly to the next generation, their essence will be exiled because once they are treated differently their

Dasein will begin to react to that treatment. If one were to look upon socially constructed images for the aged, it would be clear that society does not view the elderly person's humanity but elicits an idealization for the aging community. De Beauvoir analyzes the issue with this behavior:

The myths and the clichés put out by bourgeois thought aim at holding up the elderly man as someone who is different, as another being... The purified image of themselves that society offers the age is that of the white-haired and venerable Sage, rich in experience, planning high above the common state of mankind: if they vary from this, then they fall below it. The counterpart of the first image is that of the old fool in his dotage, a laughing stock to children. In any case, either by the virtue or by their degradation, they stand outside humanity. (3-4)

These precise idealizations negate any subjectivity these elderly individuals would still possess in society. Their *Dasein* is displaced because society rejects their individuality and views them under idealized lenses. These aging individuals struggle between what their *Dasein* is used to and how society treats them presently.

The elderly experience natural exile through any change around them – this would include the family unit. Since we understand that a person's environment a person's *Dasein*, they are displaced because they live in the past even when the communal spaces they inhabit have changed in the present. Améry describes how elderly people are attached to their past existences instead of adapting with time – and it has nothing to do with memory loss. “the aging try to situate the cultural phenomenon of this current time to accord with their reference points of their past - which was *their* time because it promised them the future, the world, and space – they

become more and more strangers to their epoch the strangeness becomes manifest to them uncertainty, objectified itself in ill humor and impotent rejection” (Améry 82). Confronted with the disharmony between their past and present experiences, the elderly are left feeling rejected. To avoid this sense of exile, the elderly will often reminisce about the days past and insist to remain independent.

Still the elderly can only ignore time’s process on the initial encounters of their displacement with society and among their family. Eventually, the elderly person will be at a space of confusion. De Beauvoir explains that "We [the elderly] are obliged to live this old age that we are incapable of *realizing*. And in the first place we have to live it, to experience it, in our bodies" (301). Ultimately, no matter how convincing and altering their environment becomes, the elderly must go through an internal process of denial to realization before they recognize their natural exile because it dramatically affects their *Dasein*. Améry also describes this same process of denial but through bodily changes instead of environmental changes. "The aging... feel the weight of time strata even when they are not fumbling after them in memory. The feeling is constantly present within them – and not only because of the diminishing powers of their bodies or the increasing sufferings these bodies cause them – that they carry *time* inside themselves and therefore do not even need to realize the past in their memory. A time-past is present" (22). His analysis defines how someone’s everyday *Dasein* is challenged and largely ignored because the elderly exist in the past and try to remain timeless. But eventually, one must come to terms with the truth of their *Dasein* that they inhabit a deteriorating body and others treat them differently for it. “our entire life passes away in the absurd effort to avoid the unavoidable: the more we 'die' and the closer we come to our last breath, the more desperately we struggle against something which in order to be sensible it is our business to reconcile

ourselves” (Améry 121). Because the American society has cultivated an environment of youth fetishization, the aged will continue to remain in denial for a longer period of time. Until they face their natural exile and reconcile with the temporal changes, they remain in a constant state of shock with their existence.

For the elderly who finally accept their natural exile, they will enter a process of authenticity and inevitability of their *Dasein*. Heidegger realizes that coming to terms with one’s final phase of life can be difficult to acknowledge. "The existential project of an authentic being-toward-death must thus set forth the factors of such a being which are constitutive for it as an understanding of death – in the sense that of being toward this possible without fleeing it or covering it over" (Heidegger 240). Once the elderly individual comes to a place where they can no longer deny their status and recognize that their lived experiences are greater than the time left for them, they become aware of their being-toward-death. When an elderly person has lived long enough to see the death of their friends and family members, they come to a state where they can no longer ignore that the end of their *Dasein* is inevitable. The final step these elderly people experience in exile is that their life will come to an end sooner- rather than later. Through viewing de Beauvoir and Améry’s works in harmony with Heidegger’s existential phenomenology, the elderly can be described as exiles because of time’s effect on their social and personal environments. It is essential to understand that the temporal nature of age affects the aging existence in society and most importantly when they view their altered bodies and deterioration. De Beauvoir and Améry are essential when studying age, no matter how dated the works appear, because they interpret the social interactions and the internal consequences these elderly people experience throughout history.

When analyzing the language and imagery our protagonists encounter, it is essential to identify how exile theory, existential phenomenology, and aging studies work together to establish the natural exile. At the heart of these theories, one's *Dasein* is influenced by the spaces people inhabit; for our aged, time will always move forward and continue to change these places. How these authors describe age's effect on the protagonists' identity will enable us to understand how literature situates age and how those aged individuals become exiled within those works.

CHAPTER 2: SOCIAL OBJECTIFICATION AND REJECTION OF THE ELDER EXILE

In most basic terms, an exile is someone who has been forcefully transplanted from one space where his or her *Dasein* took root and into another one where the space always feels foreign. For the Cuban political/geographic exile, this would be leaving Cuba to come to America. Because the societies are vastly different: from the cultural norms to the laws and language, it would explain anyone's fragmented identity. In our narratives by García, Menéndez, and Rodríguez Milanés, the characters all explore these spatial issues surrounding their former home and present lives in America. The political shift that forced our protagonists to leave home is often brought up, but their sense of displacement is compounded by a temporal shift. These narratives individually frame how the elderly character is also socially displaced because of the generational differences they notice. Again, working from the theories set up in chapter one, Heidegger explains that a person's identity is formed around the places and people they encounter daily. With that said, an aging person's social interactions will affect their *Dasein*, and this is written into each story. Even though some characters successfully assimilate into American culture, they experience exile again as their social spaces changes with time. Améry and de Beauvoir have both expressed the negative view society creates for the elderly person - exile or native. Essentially, the elderly are seen as inhuman and will not be acknowledged for anything other than what they did in their past. One level of natural exile basically through a process of social objectification and rejection. Within these two categories, the elderly person encounters idealism, becomes a minority, loses social references, and resembles mortality. The two major areas of social objectification and rejection can be seen through social constructions and interactions our authors explore.

King of Cuba, “In Cuba I was a German Shepherd,” and “Abuela Marielita” feature protagonists who have already experienced the exclusion one feels when they no longer recognize the space that structured their American *Dasein*. As a side note, “American *Dasein*” is just a phrase to remind the reader that these characters have lived in America for about as long as they lived in Cuba, so their daily experiences in American society will begin to shape their identity as well. Along these same lines, the characters are written into a world where their social objectification and rejection are clearly defined as our theories would assert. Goyo’s life between Miami and New York is engrossed by Cuban politics and the overwhelming desire to see El Comandante (a Fidel figure) die before his own body gives way. Living with this mindset, Goyo can be unaware of his social objectification in America, but his social rejection is a big part of his frustrations throughout the book. The other male protagonist, Máximo, spends his time in Miami’s Domino Park, where he interacts with his friends and society to different extremes because of social objectification and rejection. Menéndez creates a social environment where Máximo cannot help but notice America’s treatment for the aged person, so he is constantly reminded of his social place. Interestingly, Rodríguez Milanés inscribes Soledad to her daughter’s home and her memories of Cuba. Since we need to focus on Soledad’s social experiences as an elderly woman, her family and their tenants will be considered her encounter with American society. Through this setting, Rodríguez Milanés creates a space where the objectification and rejection are still experienced but in passive ways. As the analysis moves from social objectification and rejection, one can see the varied spaces our writers allow their characters to encounter the natural process of exile. With each story, the characters react differently to their exile, and the images the writers craft all align with our existential, exile and age theorists.

Literature Review

These narratives describe feelings of loss, and our exiles know they are socially outcasted because of their aging bodies instead of their Cuban origins. As the analysis progresses, it is important to realize that society does not intentionally make the exile feel at a loss, instead these are all subjective experiences the aging person recognizes because time will continue to move without their approval. Once a person enters their 60s or socially designated retirement age, society categorizes the aging differently. Elderly people are othered in American society when they are not active members. One social studies article by Rose M. Pérez, “Paradise Lost: Older Cuban American Exiles’ Ambiguous Loss of Leaving the Homeland” analyzes a doubled exile through interviews with elderly Cuban-American exiles and asserts their sense of loss because they still long for Cuba and mourn their physical decline to engage in society. Although her subjects are aged, Pérez’s social studies article focuses on their relentless reliance on their Cuban identity after living in America for years. Her analysis is helpful because she connects the influence society has over the elderly. Essentially, she determines that the elderly are negatively impacted when they can no longer navigate society. What my literary analysis emphasizes is the depictions of elderly Cuban-Americans as natural exiles within society based on the setting, imagery, and language the authors use to paint their narratives.

To consider an aged person’s social objectification and rejection, it is helpful to dive into our theoretical frameworks. As established, a person’s *Dasein* is affected by the daily interactions between the spaces and people that surround the elderly. In all stages of life people ground their subjectivity in their everydayness. When these spaces and people (society) treat the elderly individual differently because of their retirement, they no longer see the potential an elderly person still retains. This *Dasein* – this potential – allows society to directly impact their identity. This is critical because Heidegger suggests that “A *constant unfinished quality* thus lies

the essence of the constitution of *Dasein*. This lack of totality means that there is still something outstanding in one's potentiality-for-being" (Heidegger 236). Since society does not acknowledge an aged person's *Dasein* and potential, the elderly are objectified and rejected because their potential is denied. The aging theorists categorize how society denies the elderly existence. De Beauvoir shines light on social idealization for the elderly as either a wise sage or ranging old man/woman. This causes the people to objectify the elderly as something non-human because they must retain all the virtues or vices of humanity. In addition to that, Améry and de Beauvoir express how the aged become a social minority and consequently objectified because of their age and gender. Interestingly, the literature will verify how old age affects males greater than females because the males have more to lose. Finally, the theorists define a twofold social rejection: for one, the aged become strangers because the signs and signifiers change, and second, society maintains a youth fetish outcasting the elderly to ignore the older body's image of mortality. Combining Heidegger's spatial importance with de Beauvoir and Améry's temporal analysis, we can interpret why the authors create settings and dialogue that reinforce the natural exile through daily social and interpersonal interactions.

Looking at Goyo, Máximo, and Soledad through theoretical frameworks, the authors emphasize this objectification and rejection the exiles must face. Throughout these narratives, I will analyze how natural exile is woven into the texts and argue that these characters experience social objectification and rejection simply because of their aging bodies.

Social Objectification

The first instance of exile for the aged begins with the perpetuated image of the wise sage or the angry, elderly neighbor. In our narratives, the characters are subjected to this social

idealization. Their identities become exiled from social understanding because their decaying image categorizes them as the “other;” the aged person’s character is already assumed. Each writer characterizes this socially constructed idealization in differing ways, possibly because these elderly binary tropes have been overused. Either way, the process remains the same and objectifies the elderly character. These instances of social idealization are created in the narratives through the actions or dialogue active members in that society assume concerning the elderly protagonist.

Starting with social idealizations in García’s novel, the main character is filled with details that describing his physical fatigue and aging body. As a Cuban exile, Goyo’s life goal is to see El Commandante die before he does. Since he knows his own death draws closer by the day, he began taking matters into his own hands and found the hidden location where assassins were going to meet up. With strained effort through the everglades, Goyo finds the group of men and expresses his desire to participate in the fight. In response, “the men burst out laughing [and one says,]... ‘Este viejo esta loco de remate’” (García 67). These men treat Goyo like he is crazy not because of his desire to fight alongside them but because of his old age. García makes the men’s initial reaction express how they immediately look down upon him because they see his decaying body and instantly objectify him as a senile old man that wouldn’t be of use. Although the first time they use the word *viejo* (old man) is done in a condescending way, the second use seems to be sympathetic because of his age. Once Goyo Herrera explains that he isn’t afraid to die, the men start to listen to him and the leader states: “‘We have no time to waste, Herrera,’ the leader said, not unkind. ‘You had cojones coming out here, viejo.’ The sun continued its maddening glare. This wasn't how it was supposed to be. Around him the swamp gurgled and wheeled, attending to its grim business of decay. Goyo thought of how eventually everything

would perish and decompose in this muck, far from civilization's reach" (García 68). While the leader admits that Goyo is brave, we don't see him reach out to Goyo to come aboard their boat and join, instead the leader realizes that Goyo wasn't the crazy old man like he first assumed. Instead, he admired Goyo's bravery because of his old age. The thoughts Goyo has to himself reminds him that society doesn't see his potential as an assassin but sees his elderly body and rejects it. This is why García contrasts Goyo's reflection of the event to the decay and uncivilized swamp. She is not only describing how society idealizes the aged, but also how society outcasts them based on their lack of potential. "Somehow Alina had convinced the park rangers to leave Goyo in her care...Goyo wanted to be thankful but he soon grew too enraged to speak. What next? Clamping a tag on his ankle like he was some...endangered species?" (García 68). Goyo's age is the cause of his marginalized status and distance from society. For Máximo this occurs when lively and loud Catholic high school students invade the elderly's domino park. Menéndez uses words like, "dashed," "bumping," and "laughing" to describe the high schoolers' actions while in the elderly community's Domino Park. After this scene, we see "Lucinda, the woman who issued the dominos and kept back the gambling, asked them to quiet down, pointing at the men. A wind stirred the top branches of the banyan tree and moved on without touching the ground. One leaf fell to the table" (Menéndez 18). This scene parallels youthful activity with the elderly stillness. Usually, Menéndez makes a breeze flow through the air to signify Máximo's desire for Cuba, but in this scene, it is used to emphasize how society views the aged. Lucinda acts on a social idealization that the elderly men desire peace and quiet. Her gesture perpetuates the idea that the elderly do not want young people around them – isolating the aged to their own minority group. The image of the dead leaf resembles the outcasted state the elderly are experiencing because of their decaying bodies.

Because society views the elderly as non-beings, they convey social prescriptions for the elderly and idealize their activity as either a wise teacher or an easily angered recluse. So far, the male protagonists have been idealized toward the negative scope where Goyo was viewed as crazy and Máximo was viewed as angry. In Soledad's case, her gender affects its own. Instead of the sage or angry neighbor, she fulfills the role of the doting grandmother. Améry describes this process of social idealization and asserts that the elderly may choose to believe these idealizations because that is the role their environments suggest they have. Speaking of the elderly, "They do what is prescribed for them by advertisements, posters, popular newspaper articles, and even serious sociological investigations, formulated in their own way to serve the apparatus of society published for its purposes" (Améry 75). For Soledad, she willingly performs the role of the doting grandmother in her family social apparatus. We know this is a performance because she asserted her subjectivity when her daughter asked for more café and cake at a moment she was busy attending to her own activities (Milanés 70). Of course, her daughter did not think twice about getting it herself because she idealizes her own mother as the caretaker, neglecting any subjectivity Soledad has. De Beauvoir defines the unspoken rule for the elderly's character and states that "there is a desire that age should conform to the image that society has form for them. They are required to dress themselves a certain way and to respect outward appearances" (219). When her daughter asked Soledad a second time because of her idealized role of the caretaker, Soledad had to assert her subjectivity and told her daughter to "make it [her]self" (Milanés 70). Even if this seems like a small instance, Soledad was able to express her subjectivity by denying an assumption that she existed to dote on others. Milanés showcases the elderly female idealization through Soledad's daughter's actions and expectations. Even though Soledad generally conforms to the social idealization her family unit prescribes for her, this

scene describes how the elderly can and need to force their subjectivity over the idealized image if they wish to surpass the persona society creates for the aged.

In society, the elderly are exiled through a preconstructed idealization of the elderly man and woman. These assumptions assault our characters' subjectivity as we've seen with Goyo's ridicule, Máximo's annoyance, and Soledad's assertion. As one ages, their subjected place will decrease and lower to an objective position in society. Essentially, the aged become a social minority. In the case with our exiles, each laments the inhibited social accessibility as they reflect on their sense of loss.

As the aged lose their subjectivity, they become objects that society has exiled because their input is inconsequential. Menéndez really emphasizes an elderly's minority status throughout her story because of the setting she creates. While the Domino Park is a place Máximo connects with his exiled elderly friends, it doubles as a tourist spot where they view the elderly play dominos through a fence, just like they were at a zoo. The one place where he retains the most subjectivity is supplanted by the overly exaggerated public spectacle these elderly men are reduced to. In one scene just before Máximo has had enough of being a "spectacle," the tour guide describes the Cuban tradition behind dominos over a loudspeaker and says, "Folks, you here are seeing a slice of the past. A simpler time of good friendships and unhurried days" (Menéndez 25). This comment speaks to society's objectification for these Cuban old men who society suggests have no care in the world, yet these exiles long for home and familial attention. Speaking about Máximo, "When the feedback on the microphone pierced through Domino Park, he could no longer sit where he was, accept things as they were. It was a moment that had long been missing from his life" (Menéndez 26). Máximo was tired of being socially objectified and shouted out how wrong the tour guide was. As Menéndez set it up, the

games the men played were not to stay in the past, but that domino table offers the men a way to express their subjectivity in their own group and share their communal struggles of social rejection. Zimmermann argues that, “the key differences old/not-old gives rise to vastly different descriptions of value and worth... Whereas in other phases of growing old there is talk of rich possibilities, of development and becoming this is no longer the case with old people” (87). What they do is not seen as a current action stable within itself, a subjective choice these men made, but the action is simply misdirected as a ritual of tradition because of their age. When people’s potentials are denied, Heidegger asserts that, “Eliminating what is outstanding in its being is equivalent to annihilating its being” (220). Essentially, if the aged are denied their potentiality-for-being, then it is as if society has extinguished their life source because as long as a person lives their *Dasein* is still actively “being”.

This annihilation, this non-being, is depicted in Soledad’s experiences around the house. Soledad’s major objectification is being unheard. All the family members treat her this way, from her daughter to her six-year-old grandson. The first line of the story is set in bold which emphasizes Soledad’s social objectification. This section reads, “My daughter doesn’t . . .” (Milanés 62). With these three words, the author sets up an atmosphere where the reader already knows the protagonist is old enough to have a child and that that the daughter disregards something the protagonist wants to point out. After reading the story, it would be easy to fill in that statement with the daughter’s lack of care, dictating behavior, and objected oblivion towards her aging mother. Because the story is written in first-person, the reader gets a clear image of the way Soledad’s family ignores her traditions and thoughts. To finally express how Soledad has been feeling she says “[y]ou young people never ask the old ones anything because you know it already” (Milanés 71). Because Soledad is a minority and viewed without potential, her family

only acknowledges her as their old maid and wants her to do something for them. She does all the work around the house, but when she tries to give her opinion concerning her daughter's material waste, they all view her as outdated, irrational, or deem her a meddler (Milanés 67). Soledad is a minority in her own family's home and is constantly disrespected. These instances imply that, while the old individual can suggest whatever he or she believes, their voices fall among the helpless minority.

Since the social spaces in our narratives objectify the elderly, their social position will be determined against their will. This forced objectivity impacts the aging male's subjectivity greater than female's station because they have more to lose. De Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* expresses that men, like women, may be viewed as an object if they are lower on the economic scale of subjectivity upholding the Feminine Myth, and she asserts in *The Coming of Age* that growing old imposes its own form of otherness on the male individual. Speaking of the male's social position, de Beauvoir asserts:

When he loses his power, he takes on the appearance of another; he then becomes, and to far more radical extent than a woman, a mere object. She is necessary to society where he is of no worth at all. He cannot be used in barter, nor for reproductive purposes, nor as a producer; he is no longer anything but a burden. As we have just seen, he is of *granted* status, and it is therefore never subject to any sort of development. (89)

Essentially, an adult male retains subjectivity, but as a man ages, his status digresses into an objective state and becomes othered. As a male progresses into the other, the aging body becomes a source of mystery and a sign of his diminished manhood.

During one of their domino games, Máximo and the other players saw a young and beautiful woman staring at them until she left, but how the men acted following this encounter

describes their objected sense of self. When one of the men started acting out what they were feeling players responded with the following comments: “‘You’re an old fool, just like this one.’ ‘I knew a woman like that once’ Raul said after a long moment. /... ‘That’s right, he did’ Antonio said... ‘what was it? A century ago?’ / ‘We all had women’ Carlos said, and he looked like he was about to laugh again, but instead just sat there, smiling like he was remembering one of Máximo’s jokes” (Menéndez 12-13). These older men are clearly aware of society’s imposed objectivity of their male gender, no longer do they expect to rouse the attention of a young woman. Menéndez positions these men to gawk at a girl, where one elderly male “eased his body” which proves he is working just as he would have if he were a young man (12). The wording concerning the elderly men’s age and inability to capture a young woman’s attention emphasizes how they have adapted to their social othering and their minority status because their bodies would not suggest what they believe about themselves. While one might expect, Máximo’s elderly community would allow him to feel free from social othering, this scene expresses how even the elderly propitiate their own minority status. Améry explains that “An aging person is old not only to youth but also to those of his or her own age who look at the young, too, even when they arouse no look in return” (69). Since they are aware of their objectivity, they have adopted the notion that they are only objects that are unable to be with any woman. Menéndez constructs how old age would render any macho male a diminished social role and how they assume their lost subjectivity.

García makes her macho character do the exact opposite. Because the author distinctly makes her character an aged male struggling to maintain his sense of manhood, gender and age are important characteristics of his identity. Goyo is constantly concerned with his body ailment, and sexual drive. Goyo doesn’t realize that his subjectivity has been diminished because of his

economic status. He blindly says, “One of the benefits of being old and rich in Miami was that the social odds were decidedly in his favor,” (83). Goyo says this because women basically throw themselves at him, especially after he became a widower. Unlike Máximo’s group, Goyo’s environment assures him that he can still entice women, not because of his age but because of his economic status. García negatively describes Goyo as a womanizer through his disconnected yet frequent sexual encounters or flirtatious endeavors. Even if his economic status allows him to retain a level of subjectivity among women, society still views Goyo as a minority. Moments after Goyo is in a car accident (he didn’t cause), society, “revived the debate over elderly drivers” (83; 101). Although his wealth does help him maintain female companions, society still dominates his sense of subjectivity by threatening to take away his driving privileges, even when it wasn’t his fault. “Man never lives in a state of nature: in his old age, his status is imposed upon him by the society to which he belongs” (Deutscher 7). Society forces an aged male from the top in a patriarchal subjective economy to a lower status that casts him in shadow of the “other.” For the old man, his “otherness” and minority state are examples of natural exile because he did not choose to leave his subjective place in society but was forced out of his status by social constructions for the elderly. Understanding this, Máximo and Goyo experience their new minority status and its objectification.

Looking at how gender and old age other Goyo and Máximo, Soledad’s social minority status doesn’t seem to affect her as greatly. Since women are already in an objectified state, old age doesn’t necessarily change the relationship with society as much as it shapes males. The opposite may even occur where elderly women may gain a bit of subjectivity in the private sphere of their home because they can be free from being a caregiver and do as they desire. Milanés does an interesting division for Soledad’s social othering. When her family is busy at

work and school, she is free to act as she wishes. Soledad says, “I always turn [the air conditioner] off (they have five!) when they’re gone and open all the windows; I don’t even sleep with the one in my room on though my daughter can’t understand” (Milanés 67).

Remembering that Soledad’s world is composed within that house, the moment her society (family) steps away, she can express her subjectivity and desire to live naturally. De Beauvoir recognizes that some women retain subjectivity when they do not have to act as caregiver, but all are treated objectively at one point or another. “The women, both young and old, may perfectly well lay claim to authority in private, but in public life their status is always the same – that of perpetual minors” (de Beauvoir 90). This increased subjectivity in the private sphere is seen when her family leaves, but once they come home, she adopts her minority status and uses the same caregiving skills prescribed for her gender and age. “Luz is like my own grandchild because I’ve been with her since birth. Yamile leaves her with me in the mornings when she goes to work. Most of the time the baby just sits and plays in the crib while I prepare for dinner or fold the clothes” (Milanés 66). Given her workload and caregiving, at 72, Soledad is pictured in a minority state that women are subject to. Even when her family is not there, Soledad still completes the chores around the home, and this leads to her elderly status as the stay-at-home-grandmother. In the private sphere, Soledad is described to exercise her own will, but she is seen as a minority. Just like Goyo and Máximo, Soledad is still objectified because of her age. Any independence Soledad might experience by having no children of her own to look after, would be minimal because she is a part of the aged minority. Like the males, the aging body becomes a spectacle for the majority in society and negates all subjective potential. Society passively looks on at the aged bodies and leaves them behind.

Social Rejection

Unlike all other points of analysis which are external exigencies that impact an aged person's sense of displacement, an old person may feel socially rejected when the world around them as they know it has changed. For other elderly people, this means that the signs and signifiers in their culture has shifted so much, that they feel rejected when they cannot understand their world anymore. During his road trip to New York, Goyo "scanned the news stations again but turned the radio off in disgust. In an age of continual information, who really knew [any]thing" (García 190). Clearly Goyo does not agree with the current news coverage nor is he satisfied with the reports. Essentially, his problem was not *how* the news covered material, but *what* they didn't cover – for him, the Cuban dictatorship was still a hot topic that he constantly listened to and was cultivated in Miami, but the members of society who are not connected to the Cuban diaspora were disinterested in current events on Cuba. His own daughter can be an example for societal differences. Because she knows her dad constantly listens to the online radio station concerning Cuba's latest news she reminds Goyo that, "'The doctors say you shouldn't be sitting in front of the computer all day --'...'Reading crazy exile vitriol. You'll get another heart attack on top of everything!'" (García 21). Her expression depicts her disdain for the news content Goyo is obsessed over. García allows Goyo to experience social rejection from his daughter because the majority of America no longer maintains a constant review of Cuban affairs.

To complicate things further, because our characters are exiled, they suffer through not understanding the world around them twice: the first when they came to America and the second when the America they have adapted to changes culturally. Naturally these social differences

make the aged feel rejected because they cannot keep up with the ever-changing social structures. The elderly view society through a lens of past social norms and cannot adapt to the shifting signifiers and signs. All they can do is feel like a stranger, and becoming a stranger *others* the aged. Obviously, living in a constant state of nostalgia and “what used to be” will make the elderly person naturally exiled even if society didn’t intentionally impose this issue.

When Máximo came to America, he went through the first round of not understanding the world because all the signs were foreign. He was instantly rejected by society when he, “tried driving a taxi, but the streets were a web of foreign names and winding curves that could one day lead to glitter and other to the hollow end of a pistol” (Menéndez 6). Of course, his initial rejection from society’s change had nothing to do with age at the time but as a political exile. American society left him feeling rejected until he took another job cooking authentic Cuban cuisine which led him to own his own restaurant. Much later in life after he sold the successful business and retired, Máximo began to feel the same sense of loss around society in his old age. “Even now, five years after selling the place, Máximo couldn’t walk by [his old business] in the early morning when it was still clean and empty. He’d tried it once. He’d stood and stared into the restaurant and had become lost and dizzy in his own reflection in the glass, the neat row of chairs, the tombstone lunch board behind them” (Menéndez 7-8). What sustained Máximo during his earlier years in exile has become his rejection in old age. The words Menéndez used to define Máximo’s othered state like the “empty” restaurant, his “reflection,” and the “tombstone” wording describe his sense of social rejection, where death was the next dark venture his story would undergo. Menéndez further draws his sense of rejection through these *now* foreign signs and signifiers because of the scene that precedes this one. Máximo's earlier memories of Cuban

exiles gathering around empty tables in his restaurant and reminiscing of Cuba truly place the reader in a space where Máximo's sense of loss is deafening. Máximo begins to remember how:

Each night, after the customers had gone, Máximo and Rosa and Raul and Havana's old lawyers and bankers and dreamers would sit around the biggest table and eat and talk and sometimes, late in the night after several glasses of wine, someone would start the story that began with 'In Cuba I remember.' They were stories of old lovers, beautiful and round-hipped. Of skies that stretched on clear and blue to the Cuban hills. Of green landscapes that clung to the red clay of the Güines, roots dug in like fingernails in a goodbye. In Cuba, the stories always began, life was good and pure. But something always happened to them in the end, something withered, malignant. Máximo never understood it. The stories that opened in sun, always narrowed into a dark place. And after those nights, his head throbbing, Máximo would turn and turn in his sleep and awake unable to remember his dreams. (Menéndez 7)

Máximo's reflection on the stories that started with light and ended with dark mimics the very nature of his story. Menéndez's short story is largely constructed around Máximo telling jokes about Cuba, and in those spaces in between, he struggles with the dark truth of his aging existence and sense of exile in America. Looking at that empty restaurant is a symbol for his empty existence and eventual death. These scenes are a clear point for Máximo's natural exile.

These elderly people are exiled from the cultural change surrounding them. Looking at Soledad, she is constantly questioning her family's material dependence. Milanés broadens the scope surrounding social changes to those which filters into the home environment. Since Soledad's world is the home, she is constantly questioning her family's material dependents. It is strange to her that they have five different air conditioning units, three televisions, and a dryer.

She views their lifestyles as a waste of resources because she often chooses to do without the amenities her family is dependent upon. She only watches television at night when her daughter watches it, would rather use a fan instead of turning the air conditioner on, and prefers hanging clothes to air-dry; Soledad clearly doesn't want to entertain the social changes and chooses to ignore the home's social norms. Her family's dependence on these material items leaves her so confused to the point that she is often quietly questioning this social shift. She says, "I don't understand but I don't say anything" regarding the father's promise of a new television (67). After being labeled a meddler, Soledad just exists in the changing world around her and will not be a part of it. Perhaps she chooses to ignore the change because it would remind her of her rejection. Through these different lifestyles, her average everydayness is disrupted and reminds her that society continues to go on and change, leaving her behind. Soledad also expresses her rejected sense of society because she notes that women are active in the workforce. She is shocked that she has a female postal worker and says, "we have a woman delivering the mail. Isn't that something?" (Milanés 66). Soledad's brief comments on the differences she's experiencing between the world she knew and the American society leave her feeling rejected. The author's description surrounding Soledad's ambivalence and silence concerning the changing world around her suggests how the elderly will experience othering within their own home environments because of shifting signs and signifiers. The elderly will experience natural exile, even if they wish to deny its impact.

Finally, society rejects aging people because their decaying bodies signify human mortality and a future that awaits. Too often people envision their death before they envision themselves as elderly individuals. As de Beauvoir describes, "where there is no personal connection, adults feel a contempt not unmixed with discussed for the aged" (219). Since we

know society largely ignores the elderly population, there is only disdain for their image. This idea transfers onto America's youth fetishization. Looking youthful is important in American society where the elderly maintain a longer sense of denial for the natural process of time on the body. Instead of valuing the natural bodily changes, American society pushes an image and worth onto the elderly that rejects their *Dasein*.

Our authors depict how the elderly fight to ward off the social rejection the elderly undergo. Since society's primary concern is with the way the elderly's body image changes, Goyo's character is the best example for the lengths the elderly may undergo to stave off their social rejection. Since Goyo is characterized as the macho male, he wants to participate in society around him, but he is convinced that his aged body excludes him from the subjectivity he once enjoyed. Goyo reflects "How his younger self would've recoiled at the hoary vision of him now" (García 197). He even rejects his own body and is aware of younger people's opinions for the aged. García makes her character wealthy enough to have a wife that was obsessed with maintaining a youthful look and persuaded her husband to do the same. While his wife was still alive, she convinced him to have plastic surgery, "- an eye lift, fat injections into his hollowing cheeks" (García 34). Since his wife persuaded Goyo to get work done on his face, he reflected that getting plastic surgery to mask or minimize one's true age is an example of how the elderly fight to stay relevant in the social sphere. Trying to defy the rules of life will ultimately get the aged person nowhere. The moment he returned home after getting the surgery his daughter was unimpressed with the age defying work. She took one look at him and said, "What the hell happened to you?" / Never one for tact, she added: 'Dad, you look like a flounder' / It was true. Goyo wasn't sure how or why it'd happened, but his eyes had somehow drifted closer together, then migrated, slightly, toward the right side of his face" (García 34). García uses

humor to offset the truly ridiculous practice to have surgery to mask age and avoid further social rejection at their aging bodies. Instead of reconciling their place in society as an elderly person, the aged go under the knife to maintain a certain image society calls beautiful or youthful. “At a recent anniversary party for old friends, Goyo had been astonished at how youthful everyone looked until it dawned on him that nearly every octogenarian there was semibionic – artificial hips and knees, shoulder replacements, earplugs, heart transplants and a panoply of other age-defying enhancements” (García 34). Unfortunately, those who live long enough and have enough money feel the need to surgically defy time’s toll on the body. If wrinkles, sagging body parts, and grays were welcomed entities in society there would be no reason to go through pain to defy age. García’s description testifies to society’s rejection of aging bodies and the length the elderly are willing to undergo to avoid being an outcast.

Menéndez isn’t concerned with the effort aging people choose to defy their social rejection, but still highlights it based on the language Máximo’s elderly domino community embrace and reject. Unlike Goyo, Máximo doesn’t feel the need to hide his aging body but notices how society rejects him. Speaking of the tourists standing just outside the Domino Park’s fence, “Máximo said, ‘You see how we’re a spectacle?’ He felt like an animal and wanted to growl and cast about behind the metal fence. Raul shrugged. ‘Doesn’t bothered me.’ /’A ... spectacle. A collections of old bones,’ Máximo said. The other men looked up at Máximo. ‘Hey speak for yourself, cabrón,’ Antonio said. / Raul shrugged again” (Menéndez 24-25).

Menéndez’s connection between the zoo and the elderly community suggests that the tourists are not there to see Cuban culture but to view how the elderly men interact with one another. Clearly this is what Máximo is thinking they are doing, but this community would suggest otherwise. Antonio doesn’t view himself as old, even though an individual must be 55 years or older to

enjoy the park. What's interesting about Menéndez's description in the scene is that society is intentionally going to see the elderly. The framework I've been working with suggests that society doesn't want to see the elderly because it would remind them of their own mortality, but based on what the tour guide is saying they are there to see Cuban culture, as if they were going to a museum. It is quite possible that Menéndez's use of the fence and the tourist's inability to interact with the elderly players suggest that they are far enough removed from the elderly that they view them as objects. Either way, the elderly characters' personhood is rejected in this scene and setting. This idea expresses society's rejection of the individual and focuses on their decaying bodies. Because of society's own denial, the aged are exiled and outcasted for their appearance because their bodies are representing death's process.

Milanés's character is the youngest, and there isn't a detailed description of her appearance. Instead of being rejected by society through her own body, she experiences it through her friend Ofelia. Her neighbor is moved to a nursing home because she fell a few times: "her sons, God forgive them, put her in one of those homes where they are supposed to take care of old folks. She was only six or seven years older than me, and I'm 72. She was such a good listener too" (Milanés 65). Her unusual reaction to Ofelia's situation sets off an internal message where she realizes, people may think she's old if they put her friend, who's only a few years older than her, in a nursing home. It is important that Milanés details Ofelia's own sons are putting her away because Soledad can see that family will reject them if they become too old to care for themselves. Perhaps, Soledad does everything around the house to show her own daughter that she is still capable of completing activities. If she can work, she is telling society that she's not too old to be put out of their sight. Also just as telling, Soledad's final thought about Ofelia was that she was a good listener. Interjecting this reflection emphasizes how

rejected Soledad is within her own family because it is described as though she is losing someone who is interested in her stories and opinions. Although it is through another person's body, Soledad is rejected from society because she lives in a state of fear that her children would do the same and she feels a distinct loneliness through Ofelia's removal. As with Goyo and Máximo, Soledad is further exiled because she compares her situation to her friend's aging body and immediately feels the loss. As the texts have displayed in a variety of manners, the elderly experience social rejection through trying to make their body conform to America's youth fetish, by viewing them as a "sight," and through their elderly community's treatment. No matter which way these protagonists run, they will experience social rejection because their bodies represent mortality, a fact people often choose to ignore.

Conclusion

Age affects the elderly as a form of exile producing the same issues of loss and loneliness. These contemporary Cuban-American stories express society's objectification and rejection of the elderly citizens – forming a natural exile. As our narratives suggest, these already exiled Cubans become further exiled because of the American social construct where the aged person is either incredibly nice or mean, leaving no room for an individual's true humanity to shine. Additionally, the elderly exiles are objectified because they are a minority and regularly go unheard. Instead, society treats the elderly as objects that one may interact with yet offer no real value. Although men and women both feel this subjection, males suffer the greatest loss because they lose the subjective positions they once held as young men. The final examined way society exiles its age is through rejection. The first way is from the exile's subjective stance, where their signs and signifiers change and they can no longer interpret its signifiers. In this case, the individual feels rejected because they can no longer understand society around them and often are left out of the picture. The final rejection is society's need to retain and maintain a

youthful appearance. As I suggested, society doesn't want to see an aging person in her natural state because it will be a reminder of their future possibilities.

Most literary analysis of exiled literature only focus on the effects of individuals' cultural identity in the new society not on their aged identity in society. Looking at exiled literature, one can see that there are subdivisions that make someone an exile that goes beyond the political. For our characters, Goyo, Máximo and Soledad, they experience an exile that is combined with their loss in Cuba and their beings-in-time.

CHAPTER 3: THE AGING EXILE: FAMILY DYNAMICS AND PERSONAL INABILITY

The social aspects of an aging person's exile have been established, but they are subject to dislocation in more than one stratosphere. Just as their aging bodies must move through a shifting social climate that has external and internal implications, the Cuban-American exiles also experience a sense of loss on a personal level through similar factors. The shifting relationships between their children and themselves and a change in their physical bodies furthers an aging person's exile. These two relationships will be analyzed together because one directly affects the other. Loss of dependents and loss of independence are external and internal issues that our protagonists face because of time's toll on the body. Each author explores how the protagonist interacts with their family (or the lack thereof) and how they view their own decaying body.

Since our narratives begin with the protagonist as an elderly person, we can interpret their sense of loss through epistemological associations and memories. Their immediate world (their family and body) shifts and forces them into foreign territory. As de Beauvoir notes, "Old age is more apparent to others than to the subject himself: it is a new state of biological equilibrium" (284). Because our protagonists are unaware of their changed status, they are exiled in the role reversal that acts as a normal shift in familial dynamics. The characters now experience their dependents as adults who no longer rely on their support and may provide care, financial and medical assistance for parents. This relational change shocks the aged and subjects them to a loss of independence. Not only do their identities shift as providers, but they become more and more dependent as their bodies and minds weaken with age.

Most members in the elderly community have trouble engaging in the same physical activities and mental spaces they had previously done with ease. Our characters notice their

limited abilities, shifting image, and mental activity with lamentation. In each story, the issue of physical capabilities and visual dissonance is directly confronted or clearly avoided to capture the elderly person's othered body. De Beauvoir acknowledges that the symptoms of age – a frail body and various disabilities – are treated as a curable disease rather than being old. She states: the aged, “fail to see that [rheumatism and arthritis] represent a new status. We remain what we were, with the rheumatism as something additional” (285). She describes this disillusionment with the changing physical abilities and mental space the elderly identity goes through because it doesn't match what they identify within. We will see this kind of denial with Goyo and Soledad as they experience their changing body and intentional shift away from their new exiled status as an elderly person.

The elderly individual only seems to identify with the older community through existential circumstances – particularly by how their family begins to treat them. With that said, I plan to first describe the personal form of exile these characters are subject to concerning their children's care. García deals with the role reversal, going from provider to dependent, in a kaleidoscope of ways where Goyo continues to care for one child, another takes care of him, and an employee who also takes care of him symbolically. If he is the provider, his macho persona is stable in his familial connections. When he starts feeling cared for, he quickly rejects it because it goes against his macho *Dasein*. As for Soledad, she is characterized in two lights: she maintains an active demeanor to assert her vitality and prove her usefulness to the family but is displaced by her daughter's treatment and clear disregard for her ideals and traditions.

Once the aged have been exiled through external means, I will shift the focus onto the internal way one's body image and physical limitations are written into the story to further their natural exile. García, Menéndez and Milanés's stories convey how aging bodies negatively

impact their performance in the society around them. In fact, each author tackles their character's decaying body and how they handle it in three very different ways. But all our narratives leave the protagonist facing their natural exile. Goyo represents an example of wealthier individuals that go to great extents to better their image as a denial of their exile. Máximo's failing mental state expresses the debilitating means his body puts him through. Soledad is an example of the beginnings of bodily changes, leaving the individual less aware of the issue. Each level of decay is represented through our Cuban exiles. For some, their bodies are relatively the same and require denial to reject an impending exile status while others have nothing left but to mask it and detest their noticeably different bodies.

These Cuban-American narratives demonstrate how age is a natural form of exile, even reaching the exile's inner circle – their immediate family and themselves. These two forms are undeniable indicators that the individual is indeed at a loss. They no longer act as provider but need to be provided for. If they were to try and develop their own sense of self outside of their children, their decaying bodies would then remind them of lost vitality and of what once was. The elderly experience loss and displacement on both existential and internal fronts.

Existential Exile – Familial Shift through Role Reversal

The aged first notice the natural shift into exile when their family dynamics begin to change. The parental role of providing for and nurturing their children is a key identity marker, yet once that role shifts to where the parents must be taken care of by their children, the strong sense of denial and loss begins to permeate the aging person's identity. This is a process that affects these elderly people's identity. Although complete role reversal would clearly distinguish one's sense of displacement, the simplest loss of having dependents can force an elderly person to feel alone. Our protagonists experience this identity shift.

Máximo's familial shift makes him feel lost within himself because his daughters are absent in his life. This may seem to be an issue of no consequence if Máximo did not care for his daughters while they were dependent upon him, but since he cared for them, their lack of attention in his later life directly affects his identity. When describing his youthful days as a new father, time seems to carry on effortlessly (Menéndez 15). The author's detail surrounding how Máximo invested in his daughters expresses the connection he had with them and how his role as a father enveloped his time and affected his *Dasein*. Once his daughters moved on with their lives and became independent, he noticed, "the blank spaces in life lay before him. Now he stood with the gulf at his back, their ribbon youth aflutter in the past. And what had he salvaged from the years?" (Menéndez 29). Menéndez identifies Máximo's greatest worry now that he is an old man. Since his daughters do not make the effort to physically be near him, his *Dasein* suffers because his role is displaced in old age. He realizes that time has moved on, and he can never get that back. Instead his old age and absent daughters leave him in a state of regret. Without his children, he seems to be an empty man with no future. Menéndez leaves out the complete role reversal, but the absent relationship between father and daughters still forces him to face his natural exile. Because of his age, he realizes that there is nothing left that he can do to salvage the parent-child relationship. To make matters worse, Máximo was displaced among his elderly domino community when they speak about the care of their daughters. One of his friends Antonio goes to lengths to describe how his daughter cared for him and would visit that Christmas, but Máximo is hurt because his daughters only check on him over the phone (Menéndez 19-20). His distance from his independent daughters firmly reminds him of the difference between him and his elderly friends. His denied role reversal leaves him feeling lonely and thinking about his short future. In his old age, the absent role reversal still reminds Máximo

of his naturally exiled status because he is aware of time's swift passage. This relationship shift describes the simplest existential changes that forces the aged to recognize their exiled existence.

Unlike Máximo who laments his daughters' absence in his old age, Soledad avoids confronting her role reversal between her daughter and herself. Interestingly, Milanés tells us that Soledad is 72 but doesn't seem to complain much about being old or being tired from the non-stop housework. Since Soledad continues her same role around the house, how could the role reversal affect her? Soledad's main role was being a caretaker and nurturer, but in her daughter's house she is just the caretaker. She does everything in her daughter's house including the laundry, cooking, and waiting on her daughter and grandchildren. Even after all this, she still experiences the role reversal because she lives in her daughter's home and cannot raise her grandchildren as she would her own. The home environment reminds Soledad that her role as nurture is gone. With her daughter and son-in-law, she has learned to keep her mouth shut, but also that she cannot discipline her grandchildren for the way they act. As for the daughter, she takes care of her mother to the extent that she allows her to live under her roof and feeds her. Besides that, the daughter doesn't seem to care for her mother. Soledad is not taken seriously and is largely ignored even when voicing her concerns about her son-in-law's frequent absence in the home. Over time, Soledad becomes displaced into a role where she listens to her daughter's rules concerning her children and who knows that Soledad is a Marielito refugee from Cuba. Even her grandchildren reinforce her displacement as nurturer. The way they are raised reminds her of what characteristic she cannot reinforce in them like being grateful and respectful. After giving her grandson a drink, he did not thank her, and to make things worse, her granddaughter laughed in her face and said something disrespectful to her. Wishing to slap granddaughter, Soledad remembered that her, "daughter doesn't believe in that so [she] called her a fresh and shameless

girl and they kept right on laughing" (Milanés 69-70). It is essential to see how rejected she feels by the dynamic shift in her family. Although she maintains her independence to a large degree, Soledad knows her role has shifted to be the caregiver. Milanés often writes her character as resourceful in combating her natural exile. Throughout the analysis, Soledad always tries to deny her natural exile. To regain her nurturing role, she seeks another who will allow her to engage in this role.

Milanés brings in a character that allows Soledad to fulfill that absent role in her identity. Yamile and her baby Luz are sustained by Soledad's nurturing demeanor. When Soledad leaves her own daughter to take care of Yamile's little family, she is trying to reclaim her *Dasein* because she can provide and take care of them. She becomes provider and nurturer by giving Yamile a part of her Medicaid money, bringing them food, and taking care of her child while she is working (66, 69 and 70). Even with these actions, Soledad is still forced to reconcile that within her family, her role as nurturer is denied. The reason we know nurturing Yamile and Luz's does not satisfy her need to belong based on her response to her neighbor. After Yamile asks Soledad how to take care of Luz, Soledad responds with, "You young people never ask the old ones anything because you know it all already" (71). Because Yamile literally just asked Soledad for advice, it implies that Soledad is not talking about Yamile, but about her own family because that is how they treat her. Her statement is a response of her exile. She recognizes the isolation the role reversal makes her undergo. Her daughter treats her as a maid and child who must work and obey the boundaries dictated to her. The family's treatment remind Soledad that she is exiled from the nurturing identity she cultivated before moving in with her daughter and living in America.

From what we've seen so far, the role reversal's existential impact on an individual's life manifests itself on multiple levels. Máximo is independent, yet his daughters' absence leaves him exiled because of his role as the provider has come to an end. With Soledad, there's a different form of familial exile. Her family still depends upon her, yet she has no authority to capture her opinion or gain a right response. Instead, she does what she can around the house to reject being exiled, but she ultimately concedes because her opinion is of none effect. This reminds her that her role as provider and nurturer has come to an end in her familial dynamics, so Soledad experiences a partial role reversal. Goyo represents a completely other facet that role reversal can have on an aged person's exiled identity. He is the oldest character in denial of his limitations. His relationship with his son Goyo Junior (Goyito) allows him to feel independent again, yet his daughter's attention reminds him of the exiled existence.

Goyo's 60-year-old mentally handicapped son allows him to maintain his role as provider, but he does this by sending him money or putting him in various help centers. Although he does drive his son around and maintain a level of independence, Goyo cannot provide for and handle his son as he used to in the past. "What choice did Goyo have? His son would be 60 years old in 2 months" (García 183). Goyo realized that his son depended on him for monetary reasons but not for guidance or true dependence. Their relationship has been founded on Goyo's attitude of pity toward his mentally unstable son and the inability to withhold anything from Goyito, even if it goes against his better judgment. So Goyo experiences a maintained identity, but recognizes that in his old age he cannot take care of his son as he used to do.

His relationship with his daughter Alina is vastly different because the role reversal is evident in their dynamics. Yes, Goyo is rich so his daughter lives with him, but she does not

depend on him. She moved in with him to help him recover after his wife's death (García 13). After she saw how her father's advanced age affected him, she just began taking care of him. For Goyo, getting his daughter's aid, "humiliated him to have to count on her for the simplest tasks" (García 21). Instead of welcoming the care, he reflects on his past identity when he was his daughter's "sun." He realized that this identity was gone, and with each helping hand, he remembered his dependent status. Existentially, the relationship changed because of his debilitating body, and he wanted to stay as far away from this truth as possible. Instead of recognizing that his daughter truly wanted to care for him because that was her new role, Goyo believed she had ulterior motives (García 13). By denying his daughter's true intentions, Goyo was denying his exiled status. The main reason this is important is to know Goyo's reaction to his daughter's care when compared to his employee Victor. Just as his daughter Alina does, Victor supports Goyo by cooking for him and making sure he is comfortable (García 197). Victor is his contractor/employee which watches over his decaying property -- the Brownstone. Later, I will discuss the Brownstone as a symbol for Goyo's body; however, if we view the building as such and apply it to Victor's responsibilities, he represents the role reversal where Victor also takes care of Goyo. Unlike his constant annoyance towards his daughter's care, Goyo doesn't even seem to notice Victor's attentiveness except noting these gestures (like propping his feet up and making warm tea when Goyo awoke) "meant that Victor was nearby" (García 213). Perhaps Victor's gender plays a role in Goyo's reaction to being cared for in his old age, but the opposing reactions Goyo exhibits toward his daughter and Victor's actions show the familial factor truly leaves an individual's identity in shambles. Alina used to depend on Goyo, but when she tries to care for him in his old age, she is met with a fight or an assumed ulterior motive. The role

reversal triggers one's essential awareness of their age. Their identity is exiled because of the shifting intimate relationships between parents and their children.

Our narratives demonstrate how the levels of individual role reversal influences the protagonist's identity and exiles him or her through age. The existential exile occurs when family relationships change. The change forces individuals to look at themselves and realize life is not what it once was and will never return there; time has exiled their *Dasein*. In each story, the exile reminisces about the relational change between their role as provider or caregiver and the adults that their children had become. Máximo's exiled because the daughters he once treated as jewels only converse with him over the phone because they are too busy to visit him – leaving him completely alone to realize his future is a void (Menéndez 29). His elderly community, which should add to his fulfillment, reminds him that children should dote on their parents in this phase of life, but he doesn't even get that. So his children's absence and his community remind him that he is aged and exiled uniquely. Soledad's character reminds us of how far individuals are willing to go to ignore the signs of their existential exile in age. She focuses on maintaining her identity as a caregiver by doing everything for her daughter, yet that is not enough because she must submit to her daughter's rules around the house and with her grandchildren. To fulfill her need as instructor, she focuses on Yamile to re-establish that identity. Even though Soledad is the youngest exile in our group, she still experiences the shift in her identity, and it reminds her of her age. Goyo is a true example of a role reversal as exile because of the change between relationship with his daughter. His dependence on his daughter forces him to come face-to-face with his body's limitations, and it makes him react negatively toward his daughter's efforts, but we don't see the same reaction toward Goyo Jr. or Victor. These stories describe how an elderly

person's *Dasein* is negatively influenced through varying levels of role reversal, as we saw in the narratives.

Internal Exile: Decaying Body

This may seem like an obvious truth for the aged, yet internalizing their new elderly status is one that is first expressed by outside factors and undergoes a process of reinforcement and acclimation within themselves. This points to the unusualness of old age and its exile. Time leaves the individual with all their identity shaping experiences and forces them to traverse the unknown. This is why the process of aging is an exile. Like an individual forced to leave all that they have known and the spaces that make up their identity, time takes the aged to a space where their own bodies undergo a distinct change which they cannot reconcile within themselves. Améry describes a unique relationship between time and the aged identity. Though time is moving and affecting their bodies, they live and draw their identity from the past. The aged remember their former abilities and reject their current bodies and ailments.

The ways our protagonists' bodies are characterized express that the process of exile through one's body is gradual. First, it comes from without, and then it manifests from within. Our varied protagonist experience exile differently because they are written at different ages - hence a different level of exile. Soledad is in her early 70s while Goyo and Máximo are in their mid 80s. This age gap is a major factor in each story's depictions of the decaying elderly body. Their decaying bodies objectifies them and becomes a diminished reflection of the one each exile has come to identify with throughout their lives. Naturally, their bodies shape their identity, and as time passes, they are face-to-face with an image they must reconcile with their internal persona. Not only does their physical body change, but their abilities also diminish. The aged realize that there are physical and mental activities they struggle performing. Of course, the

decay is a slow process and can leave the elderly person in shock and left to reconcile their memory and the person they have become (seemingly overnight). Just as time moves, the younger the aged person is, the less likely they are to realize their exile. As seen with our protagonists, this is the case. There are levels of one's exile through the body. Soledad represents the youngest aged who are in complete denial. Then there are others like Máximo, who suffer true decay but feel bad about it and choose to hide it from others. Finally, there are the elderly who have come to terms with the disabled body and spend their days reminiscing or agonizing over the version of themselves at the end of their life. The aging body is a natural exile because there is nothing one can do to change the process of time. The desire to deny, hide, and criticize their changing features and diminished abilities is evident in our narratives.

As noted in the previous paragraphs, Soledad still doesn't recognize herself as aged; she exists in the early stages of her exile. The first step where one identifies with the aged is when people close to them are treated as old people. This happens to Soledad when her friend Ofelia is put in an old folks' home. Soledad recognizes that her friend often fell and essentially could not take care of herself, but she would not characterize her friend as elderly and believed Ofelia's sons were wrong for placing her in an elderly home (Milanés 65). The root of the problem extends when Soledad places herself in the picture. She gauges herself and her friend as relatively close together in age. De Beauvoir analyzes a similar situation where a lady is able to recognize another woman as elderly, yet has difficulty doing so with herself even though they're experiencing similar situations. "Confronted with the other older woman, her immediate reaction was to think of herself as ageless; it required an effort of reflection for her to liken her situation to theirs" (294). De Beauvoir calls this a moment a realization once the lady was able to identify her situation with the other woman.

Perhaps Soledad tries to ignore the thought that Ofelia is old, even though there are clear markers to express her debilitating body. To avoid her status, Soledad denies Ofelia's age and exile because she relates to her friend, just as the woman in De Beauvoir's story acknowledged. To deny her own age, she denies her friend's deteriorating body. Soledad is a good example for the elderly denial of one's aging body. The only reference she makes to her own body's changes is her forgetfulness. But she claims that she'll remember it later (Milanés 68). Soledad doesn't want to be a part of the aged, especially since her body hasn't inhibited most of her daily routines.

When one's body noticeably deteriorates, the most definite level of elderly exile has taken place. Because Soledad is at least ten years younger than our other exiles, we've been able to see the onset of her exile and the intentional denial she creates to avoid being aged. On the other hand, Máximo and Goyo cannot deny their aging and decaying bodies. For Máximo, he internalized his age and chooses to keep it to himself. His main encounter with his decaying body is his mental state. It started after he suffered the loss of his wife Rosa. "Máximo didn't want to tell how he'd begun to see her at the kitchen table as she'd been at 25" (Menéndez 9). He understood that this was abnormal and did not want others to see his decaying mental state. As Menéndez characterizes him, Máximo was a professor in Cuba before he left, so his mind was his prized possession. If he were to tell anyone, this would exile him further. As time went on, his mind kept decaying and more people started showing up at his table. "Sometimes at the table, he greeted old friends and awoken with the start when they reached out to touch him" (Menéndez 14). Throughout the story, his loneliness takes center stage and reminds him that he has no future but to relive what memories and friendships he had in the past. Dementia makes Máximo live in a constant state of the past which contradict the body he inhabits. Feeling lonely, Máximo

notices, "his own speckled hands" (Menéndez 10). When Máximo feels lonely, his decaying body is more noticeable to him. His mental state deteriorated after his lifelong companion died, and his physical body is noticeable when he feels alone.

The body, which includes the mind, naturally becomes something other than what the aging person is used to. No longer are they able to engage in friendships that previously sustained them or enjoy activities that brought joy to their life. Máximo's aging mind allows him to experience moments of happiness until he realizes that these people are not eating at his table. His dementia reminds him of his exile as a lonely elderly man.

Goyo's situation is different in many ways. Instead of denying or hiding his changing body, he's constantly aware of the altered body he inhabits. From performing sexual acts to his basic appearance, Goyo notices time's effects on his body. He has used various methods to slow down the aging process like surgery, taking medication and having others help take care of him like Alina and Victor. After all he's done to slow time's process, he is forced to come to a place where he must recognize that he's an elderly man. Goyo's continuously decaying body makes him identify as an elderly person, but he constantly criticizes the change that has overcome his body. After waking up in the Brownstone,

Goyo reached for a tissue and trumpeted away the night's accretion of mucus. How his younger self would've recoiled at the hoary version of him now, with his back brace and bifocals, his bruised and bleeding gums, his lamentable sag of balls. His eyes felt sticky, too, as if they had been smeared with honey. Sometimes he pictured himself growing wild in old age; his shoulders upholstered with mold, his lungs wheezing like a leaky bassoon. Only infirmity or impending death truly showed people what tedious organisms their bodies could be. (García 197)

The whimsical way García describes his body seems like Goyo views his elderly body as an object, not a part of his subjective being. He sees what his body is becoming and still criticizes it as if he were a man criticizing the way something was built. As mentioned earlier, García makes a clear allusion to Goyo's body and the state of the Brownstone. His owned apartment building was decaying before his eyes, just like his body was. García's language references decaying material objects like his upholstered shoulders and leaky lungs. "A chunk of plaster fell from the ceiling onto his bed in a puff of dust. Goyo sighed. His work was never done. The Brownstone might look sturdy on the outside...but below the surface, all was decay" (García 196). No matter the work Goyo might put on the building its foundation was ravaged by time. Just like Goyo's many failed attempts to remodel and modify his apartment complex to be deemed safe again, his decaying body would always be the body of an 86-year-old, not the one he identified with and remembered. For Goyo, his age made him exiled from the life of subjective independence that he was used to as a young man before his body started to deteriorate. Now the only thing he can do to reject his aging body is objectify it through criticism which allows him to feel distance from it and his exile.

Role Reversal and the Body: From Denial to Realization

These characters exhibit what the decaying body does to one's identity. Internally, the aged person believes and recognize their *Dasein* from their past. Because the "time-past" factor that Améry explained is the elderly's present, they are exiled through their physical and mental inabilities. Some characters begin with denial as Soledad does because the symptoms of old age can largely be assumed as something outside of oneself. As one ages, the individual may fall into hiding their difficulties. Finally, as Goyo does, the elderly person comes to terms with the exile and falls into criticizing the current, decaying body.

In this chapter, the exile is drawn with external and internal changes that forces the individual to encounter this new stage of life. Through the role reversal, the aging parents can no longer continue with their identity as provider and caregiver. Instead, their children are independent and often end up caring for their parents. Faced with the external relationship change, the aged begin to look at internal factors that have led up to such a shift. We have seen that each protagonist confirms the notion of exile through their situational role reversal. The natural exile will follow a pattern of denial and realization of their aging body.

Age is a product of time, and identity is shaped based on experiences and environment. The elderly are thrown into their new roles and limited bodies because they live in denial until it physically changes their environment (homelife and body image). The familial role reversal is a natural form of exile because the external family unit has changed and leaves the aging person with a conflicted *Dasein*. Then, their decaying bodies exile them from the individual identity they have cultivated for their entire lives. To have one's most immediate environment/spheres change, the aging person's exile is inevitable. The aged will become displaced among their family and within themselves.

CHAPTER 4: AGE AS NATURAL EXILE

Throughout each chapter we have come to view exile, the term long used for a person's ties to one and all living in a different country, in a new form that will affect those who live long enough to grow old. Unlike the unnatural state of exile that is brought on via a forced geographical switch, a natural exile is someone who has encountered the final phase of life where their being, or *Dasein*, is displaced socially, intimately, and internally. What makes this format of exile natural is its reliance on time. Generally, the exile is forced to maintain a sense of denial until they are inevitably exiled from their past and current environment.

The Inevitability of Death in Natural Exile

The idea of the inevitable is the last stage of this natural exile because one has come to terms with the prospect of dying. They must encounter thoughts of leaving one life for the next. Máximo and Goyo come to this moment where there seems to be nothing ahead of them and everything behind them. Jean Améry stresses this idea when describing the line of horizon for the aged:

Future, whatever is coming to us, we said, is space in the reality of the lived; the aging lose the former with the latter. What they exchange for it is a feeling of indistinct and definitely sloppy temporal indifference. It...includes [their fear] and makes it even bearable. They look back into a past of moving backgrounds of years and stages of life that change their quantitative value in the process of remembering. But it is always the case that every arbitrary time span from the past seems tiny to them, while they cannot even foresee the same stretch of time in a shadowy and dubious future. (124)

The reality of death becomes an inevitable truth where the aged person recognizes that their best memories were experienced in the past and that their future is limited. Máximo acknowledges this when he is alone at his table; he remembered the life he had and compares it to the life he holds now: "the blank spaces in his life lay before him. Now he stood with the gulf at his back" (Menéndez 29). He understood that his past is a majority of his life's timeline. Menéndez uses descriptive words to describe the limited time Máximo has. His future is but a "space" allotted to him while his past was a "gulf" of time. Unlike the future of a younger person full of potential and possibilities, the aged realized that death is inevitable, and that their future, however long, was a smaller unknown. Menéndez paints Máximo's awareness and has him dream about it. Máximo "slept, and in his dreams, he was a green and yellow fish swimming in warm waters, gliding through the coral, the only fish in the sea and he was happy. But the light changed and the sea darkened suddenly and he was rising through it, afraid of breaking the surface, afraid of the pinhole sun on the other side, afraid of drowning in the blue vault of sky" (Menéndez 27). This dream conveys the natural exile in its totality. What used to be a life full of possibilities and "warm waters," quickly turns into an awareness that drowning in the surface becomes a possibility. The elderly must face the reality that death is inevitable. In his natural exile, Máximo is aware and afraid of death's certainty. Old age is the only time one expects death to arrive at any moment, and this scene describes the legitimate fears the exiles will maintain.

Existing in such a state would bring one's exile to their very essence. Heidegger investigates what being aware of one's mortality does to someone's *Dasein*, and he calls this the authentic being-toward-death. Normally, people are aware of death, yet they do not experience it as a true possibility where it can occur at any moment. Heidegger describes death as, "the ownmost nonrelational, certain, and, as such, indefinite and not to be bypassed possibility of

Dasein" (239). The more one experiences death around them and draws near in old age, the thought of death becomes an inevitable truth that the individual must learn to live with. At the end of life, our exiles are forced to live in this authentic state where death is inevitable, and they see it as such. At the end of *King of Cuba*, Goyo dies of a heart attack--something he has experienced once already. As a lifelong El Comandante-hater, he was planning to die while he assassinated the Fidel figure. His old age and authentic sense of being could have made him make the choice to die a hero instead of an old man. The day of his planned assassination, he realizes he didn't need to check his blood pressure and wanted to iron things out in his will before he faced death. García made death inevitable that day for Goyo, but she made sure he died because of an old heart. Just as Goyo was to pull the trigger, he had a heart attack and "death, instant, touched his brow" (García 234). The day before his death, Goyo knew his body was acting strange. "It couldn't be another heart attack, he assured himself, because his chest didn't hurt. He closed his eyes and tried to steady his breathing, to tamp down the anxiety he felt" (213). He knew his life was coming to an end, but he wanted to die his own way. Death was inevitable so he, "wanted [his life] to mean something" (212). He could pick and lay out his future, or so he thought. The final form of exile, living with the inevitability of death, isolates the aged permanently. They live in a state of anxiety because they are only waiting for death to come, not the next big job opportunity or the social experience. Death is the only certainty.

Political Exile and Natural Exile: Analysis Through Narratives

Our protagonists, Soledad, Máximo, and Goyo are natural exiles because the narratives capture how society, the family, and their own bodies displace their *Dasein*. The writers create settings, dialogue, and character dynamics that establish how an elderly person can be rejected. When reading these texts through exile theories, existential phenomenology, and aging studies

perspectives, these characters exhibit common tropes of an exile: feelings of displacement, nostalgia, loss, and a double identity. Even though politics and geography have been the traditional cause and analysis of exile, temporal shifts can easily force an elderly person into exile. The main difference between the natural exile and the political/geographical exile is how quickly the individual experiences their removal. In other exilic literature, the characters described a clear sense of their loss the moment they arrive in a foreign space, but our collection of elderly Cuban-American narratives provide a spectrum of expressed loss. Milanés' character is so much younger that she can easily ignore the largely subtle signs of her exile. She is still active and retains her independents, but she quickly denies the issues of memory, her roles, and rejection. Our other authors, García and Menéndez have much older protagonists that are largely occupied by their rejection in society, displacement among their family, and awareness of their body's decay and imminent death. Goyo does what he can to maintain a youthful appearance, questions his daughter's aid and support, and chooses to take death in his own terms because he's already aware of its inevitability. García creates a story around this awareness for his old age, but Goyo is constantly fighting the natural process of his exile. This is not true for Máximo. Even though he is just as aware of his age and exile, Máximo is in a constant state of reflection surrounding his age, but he tries to lighten the last part of life by spending time playing dominoes and telling jokes to his elderly friends. Menéndez captures the beauties and struggles the aged exile experiences when they are clearly aware of their existence and its inevitable decline. Among these three narratives, the natural exile is conveyed as a gradual process but will end in an exiled existence. Soledad is in denial of her exile and chooses to ignore it; Goyo is aware of his exile but fights against it in every sphere, while Máximo recognizes it and makes his last

moments worthwhile. Our authors depict how a temporal exile affects each person's *Dasein* differently in each sphere of life.

Since the natural exile is dependent on time's toll on the body and their environment, the process of exile does advance as the years go by. Socially, it's been determined that a person's culture and traditions shift with each generation. This difference often causes the aged individual to look back on what used to be and feel displaced from the social shift that takes place over time. Moreover, society begins to remind them that their presence is no longer required in the workforce nor admired. It moves on without the aged, and they are forced into segregated communities.

We then move to the next sphere to determine the other level of exile--the familial dynamics. The exile learns that their place as nurturer and provider is lost and becomes replaced with the role reversal where the child takes care of the elderly parent. Our two protagonists Soledad and Goyo live with their children but react differently to the role reversal. To deny her exile, Soledad does everything for her daughter, but she knows that her nurturing identity will not be accepted and chooses to deny her age. Goyo is completely exiled by the role reversal and is embarrassed and distrusts his daughter's care the entire time. He dislikes his daughter because he is dependent on her for various things around the house. These examples offer a depiction of the displacement the elderly parent experiences in old age.

The other level is the exile via one's own deteriorating body. These characters demonstrate that it takes others to help the individual recognize their aging bodies. Again, Soledad is in denial, while Máximo chooses to hide his dementia. Goyo completely sees his decaying body and constantly criticizes its performance. These characters are experiencing the different levels of decaying bodies, yet all the protagonists choose to reject their physical change.

The natural exile leaves the elderly person in a state where death has become inevitable. This is the exile of the aged.

Throughout my analysis of these texts, I have established age as a natural form of exile as described through Cristina García's *King of Cuba*, Ana Menéndez's "In Cuba I was a German Shepherd," and Cecilia Rodríguez Milanés's "Abuela Marielita." As a people age, they slowly become displaced from their society, within their family, and amid their own body. The process of natural exile is slow enough that there is room for initial denial and can be ignored as a momentary event. All-at-once, the elderly person must learn to reconcile their identity with their *Dasein*. They feel exiled because they hadn't noticed society's initial push, the need for their children's aid, or that their bodies' abilities are increasingly limited. Instead, all these spheres of change come crashing in on them when someone identifies them as aged, they need their children's help for menial tasks, and their bodies look different and its abilities are noticeably diminished. This process suddenly takes full-effect and forces the aged into an exile where they focus on the past and must recognize their inevitable state is drawing closer. For these reasons, the term "exile" should be expanded to cover the temporal displacement the aged experience naturally.

What can be Expanded

In this study, my literature analysis of elderly Cuban-American exiled protagonists was limited because writers don't seem to be drawn toward the uniqueness of the elderly experience. If I were to expand my research to any depictions of elderly characters, it would be interesting to see how other authors may cast elderly characters into the narrative. I would get a more diverse group of literature and crafted situations to explore the natural process of exile. With my chosen narratives, *King of Cuba*, "In Cuba I was a German Shepherd," and "Abuela Marielita," I was

able to explore a broad spectrum of aging exiles. If I were to have a larger sample, the ways society, family and the self impact the exile could be furthered. The whole temporal process of natural exile would be better defined because I could compare how authors believe a 70- and 75-year-old may differ from one another and where they exist in their process of exile. If I had more defined age groups, there would be a clearer vision for the process of natural exile in literature. Another concept I would like to dive into is how the elderly's economic situation contributes to their process of exile. García made Goyo wealthy, and Menéndez made Máximo poor. Even though they were cast around the same age and should suffer the same level of exile, how these characters dealt with their exile differed. One was disgusted by every difference around them while the other was more realistic and accepting of the natural situation. I can't help but reason that Goyo's wealth allowed him to ignore time's effects longer because he was able to attain surgery and maintain an active sex life after his wife's death. These narrative components define and complicate how an elderly person interacts with their natural exile.

Because existential phenomenology and aging studies describe various scenarios surrounding a person's *Dasein* and their age, further literary analysis will benefit how authors may fulfill, redirect, or defy these theories. As the American society starts to be more inclusive concerning its minorities, perhaps American literature will begin to engage the story of elderly minorities and offer conflicting views that de Beauvoir and Améry may not have observed or foreseen. Either way, the elderly will always have one major experience in common – the inevitability of death. Regardless of how the elderly are depicted, the aging process can still end on a light note in the next life.

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