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Displaced and Misplaced: The Bifocality of Space and the Perpetual Escape in Ana Menéndez's *Adios, Happy Homeland!* and Cristina García's *King of Cuba*.

Cuba. This simple, four-letter word has sparked conversation and debate for centuries, from Christopher Columbus's *encuentro*, the treatment of the Taíno, José Martí's demand for independence, to Fidel Castro and the Revolution. Cuba continues to remind and evoke strong emotions, to incite heated discussions of what the island was and remains to be. Present-day artistic representations of the country and its legacy continue to do the same; questions of national identity, sovereignty, ethnicity, race, politics, and economics are all mixed and twisted together into an artistic Cuban *ajiaco*. In 1959, with the beginning of the Cuban Revolution, steered by drastic social and economic changes implemented by the Castro regime, Cuba's population began to move or flow outwards. This massive emigration created what is now the third-largest diasporic Hispanic population in the United States today (Blanco 73). In four distinct waves from 1959 to the 1990s, Cubans moved to other Spanish-speaking countries, such as Mexico and Spain. However, the majority (over 1 million) chose to rebuild their lives, 90 miles away, mainly in Miami-Dade County, Florida (Blanco 73). The first generation of Cuban immigrants, the "Golden Exiles," arrived in Florida in the 1960s and brought



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their children, many of whom were adolescents or even younger still (Duany 42).

Notably labeled the 1.5 generation or “one-and-a-halfers” by Gustavo Pérez Firmat, these children and adolescents grew up in the US and formed a unique, hyphenated, national, and cultural identity (3). Furthermore, younger first-generation Cubans began having children in the US and later the one-and-a-halfers started families of their own. These second-generation artists and authors, who has been labeled as ABCs (American Born Cubans) or Cuban-American ethnic writers, tend to express themselves and produce works based on or influenced by their particular situation (O’Reilly Herrera xviii and Alvarez Borland 8).

Since the early 1990s, there has been an explosion of Cuban-American literary production, especially by female authors. Literary critics such as Rocío Davis and Andrea O’Reilly Herrera have referenced authors like Cristina García and the significant representations of Cuba and the overall importance of space and the voyage to the island have in her novels. Many Cuban-American women writers, who published during the same decade as García, have also included fictional accounts of travel across the Florida Straits in their own works. These authors, such as Tina Matlock, Margarita Engle, Achy Obejas, Ivonne Lamazares, and Teresa Bevin grapple with the idea of



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homeland and the bonds imposed by social, political, and familiar forces. The aim of this article is to contribute to the aforementioned discussions by exploring Ana Menéndez's *Adios, Happy Homeland!* (2011) and Cristina García's *King of Cuba* (2013).

The focus is on the complicated and intimate representations of space and the return to Cuba that continue to haunt Cuban-American writers and artists in the 21st century. By selecting two of the 27 short stories in Menéndez's *Adios, Happy Homeland!* and comparing them with García's *King of Cuba*, my goal is to highlight the Cuban and Cuban-American condition and the interplay of real and imagined space within the context of literary expressions of travel between the United States and Cuba.

Theoretical Framework

In an eclectic mix of postmodern, postcolonial, and cultural studies, there have been numerous attempts at defining the uniqueness of the transnational label, an identity that has been applied to the exile. The exile's disposition demands a perspective that looks beyond the limitations of any monolithic idea of community, nationhood, or national culture. As Homi Bhabha theorized, the exilic condition can be discussed from the boundaries of ideology and discourse, the borderlands of culture. The exile is both located and dislocated in the "in-between" space, which he argues is in



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a continuum with the past and constantly intersects the present and future (225).

O'Reilly Herrera explains in her article, "Inheriting' Exile: Cuban-American Writers in the Diaspora," that: "diasporic cultural identifications or differential identities are formulated in 'an interstitial future that emerges in-between the claims of the past and the needs of the present.' They are dis-located in a present that is always negotiating between the past and the future" (192). This "in-between" space is analogous to what Bhabha describes as the perpetually contingent borderline condition in which cultural translation and production occur. Furthermore, O'Reilly Herrera underscores the fact that Cuba, "by nature of its strategic physical location and consequent political and social history," is transnational and multicultural and thus, by extension, Cubans "possess multiple and sometimes conflicting histories, and inhabit various shifting cultural spaces and perspectives" (4).

Diasporic identities, like postcolonial identities, have various and constantly shifting subject positions. In the case of diasporic Cubans, these shifting positions can best be understood in the context of Cuban and Caribbean history, where aspects of rupture, dispersion, and cultural transformation interface. Edward Said proposes that the defensive nationalism of exiles can sometimes create self-awareness. He alludes to



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examples of restoration projects from the twentieth century for Jews and Palestinians.

He states:

Such reconstitutive projects as assembling a nation out of exile involve constructing a national history, reviving an ancient language, founding national institutions like libraries and universities. And these, while they sometimes promote strident ethnocentrism, also give rise to investigations of self that inevitably go far beyond such simple and positive facts as 'ethnicity.' (184)

Said argues that the exilic condition should not be considered a privilege, but an "alternative to the mass institutions that dominate modern life" (184). In any case, the condition of the exile is not a matter of choice but rather a reaction to political instability, persecution, or the effects of being born into a particular generation. The state of the Cuban-American exile can thus be read as a hybrid identity that shares common characteristics of citizens of the United States and Cuba. In many situations, Cuban-Americans do not fit perfectly within the dominant American culture, but represent an "alternative" or fringe community that strives to maintain a balance between their two distinct heritages. Moreover, Cuban-American writers tend to



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investigate travel between Cuba and the United States in unique and non-traditional ways, questioning the effects of the trip from a variety of perspectives and breaking heteronormative stereotypes.

It is important that we understand the political, economic, and social environment in both countries during the late 20th and early 21st century. As Isabel Alvarez Borland, William Luis, and Juan Flores have clearly indicated, there has been a surge of female Latina authors, many of whom have Cuban roots, writing in English over the past 25 years. Luisa Campuzano suggests that this is in part due to the drastic economic changes in Cuba after the fall of the Soviet Union. She expounds:

[I]n the 1990s, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, while Cuba underwent a drastic economic contraction that had major repercussions in every sphere of life, an explosion of feminine narrative writing occurred that now, as the twenty-first century begins, has become one of outstanding features of contemporary Cuban literature. (9)

Due to these sweeping changes, policies at the state level have impacted travel restrictions between Cuba and the United States. Susan Eva Eckstein describes the



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financial crisis resulting from the collapse of the Soviet Union as a catalyst for the Cuban authorities to desire “dollar-infusing diaspora visitors” (135). Eckstein clarifies:

Officials took several initiatives to facilitate and encourage visits. They removed the cap on the number of Cuban Americans permitted to visit annually, they extended the length of time of permissible visits, and they made travel more affordable by ceasing to require visiting émigrés to stay in state-run hotels (thereby enabling hotels to concentrate on accommodating hard currency-paying tourists). Cuban authorities also reduced bureaucratic hurdles. To make visits more likely, they introduced multiple entry permits. And they retracted an earlier requirement that Cubans who emigrated illegally needed to wait five years before being allowed to visit. (135)

In response to the less restrictive travel constraints in Cuba, the United States, fueled by conservative Cubans living in Miami, increased many of the requirements that granted travel across the Florida Straits. However, these new policies ultimately failed to discourage certain groups from visiting the elusive island. The taboo of returning to Cuba was still very common among older members of the exilic Cuban



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community, but some of the 1.5 and 2nd generations who wished to experience Cuba for themselves, did break ranks and embark on the voyage. These waves of visits to Cuba in the 1990s and early 2000s helped create “refracted images”, as Adriana Méndez Rodenas suggests, that are not “merely two sides of the nation (inside/outside Cuba) but contradictory visions at each end of the spectrum (147). She confirms that “for most displaced Cubans, Cuba is a place of detachment, a territory propelling its people outward, fostering a condition of perpetual flight” (149).

In his latest book, Jorge Duany, borrowing from Steven Vertovec (2009), applies the term “bifocality” to the particular situation of transnational, diasporic Caribbeans. Bifocality seeks to describe “the dual frame of reference through which expatriates constantly compare their home and host countries” (2). Duany argues that the diasporic communities “routinely engage in activities and relationships that bind them to both ‘here’ and ‘there’” and that they “may remain attached to their places of origin even as they settle down in their new domiciles” (2). Moreover, bifocality not only shapes the experiences of first-generation, but also 1.5-generation and second-generation immigrants, “often raised in extended transnational households” (Duany 2). In other words, like O’Reilly Herrera, Duany argues that children and grandchildren of first-



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generation Cuban migrants may live or inhabit “cultural borders” without technically crossing legal boundaries between the United States and Cuba (2).

In what follows, I set forth an analysis of two literary works from Menéndez and García, focusing on the unique representations of real and imaginary space as a driving force in their protagonists’ exploration of transnational identity and exilic sentiment. Due to the authors’ own personal experiences of travel between Cuba and the United States, I argue that they not only create literature that figuratively straddles the Florida Straits but also includes semi-autobiographical references of their creators’ own hybrid Cuban-American identities. Moreover, this particular artistic expression encourages the reader to reflect on the curious, but constant negotiation and bifocality of the Cuban diaspora.

Adios, Happy Homeland!

In her latest work, *Adios, Happy Homeland!* (2011), Ana Menéndez gracefully steps out of her comfort zone to produce a post-modern take of traditional Cuban-American literature. A formidable departure from her previous works such as *In Cuba I was a German Shepherd* (2001), *Loving Che* (2003), and *The Last War* (2009), *Adios, Happy Homeland!* deconstructs the Cuban-American short story by toying with the very



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premise of what a collection of short stories signifies. Born in Los Angeles, California, to Cuban exiles, Menéndez has worked as a prize-winning journalist since 1991, most recently for *The Miami Herald*. Although born off the island, Menéndez's personal travels across the world and especially to Cuba have influenced her writing and the overarching themes found in her fiction. In a 2012 interview she states, "For me, yes, this wrestling with truth is paramount. It's the obsession – or should I say puzzle – that has driven all my books in one way or another...Fiction – any art really – is the best way to explore the dynamic between what is real and what lives only in the imagination" (Young).

This anthology of fictitious contributions from invented authors is a delightful masquerade of performance and identity, and is sure to confound and puzzle some readers, especially those who have not read Menéndez's other manuscripts or fundamentals from the Cuban-American canon. To begin, we must briefly review the curious structure of *Adios, Happy Homeland!*. At its most basic level, it is a compilation of 27 short stories, organized by a fictional editor and curator, interestingly named Herberto Quain (an obvious reference to Jorge Luis Borges' "Examen de la obra de Herbert Quain"). Quain, who introduces the book in the prologue, is essential to the



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overall effect of playfulness and meta-commentary offered to the readers. In his introduction Quain focuses on his upbringing in Ireland, his relationship with his father, and his obsession with all things Cuban. He states that Cuba had always remained a “boyhood dream” and that “the desire to escape – the longing for wings – was not a private fantasy” (9). The fictional editor admits to falsifying his credentials after moving to Cuba to obtain a position at the National Library, claiming that he had earned a doctorate of letters from Trinity College. Quain concludes his prologue by acknowledging that he decided to compose a “modest anthology” of his life’s investigations after learning the “language of escape” (11). The collection contains numerous references to well-known authors such as Ernest Hemingway, José Martí, Reinaldo Arenas, and Alejo Carpentier. In addition, Menéndez sneaks in characters from her previous works, like Teresa de la Landre from *Loving Che*.

The delicate theme of space and escape (or the impossibility of escape) remains a common topic within diasporic literature of the Caribbean, especially in Cuban-American works. Eliana Rivero attempts to describe Cuban-Americans by labeling them “dislocated TransCuban;” meanwhile David Rieff mentions the “scared illness” affecting those who maintain a love for the elusive island, a term coined by Rene Silva



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(Rivero 198 and Rieff 102). O'Reilly Herrera has argued that the representation of the physical space of Cuba can be and has been interpreted by Cuban exiles as both real and imaginary. Often a voyage or travel to the island tends to lead to a feeling of “unbelonging” or disillusionment. She acknowledges this possible reaction, calling it “a kind of vicarious Odyssean complex” (xxiii). In other words, the Cuban exile experience allows for a unique possibility of creating an unreachable paradise, or “lost world,” based on fragmented recollections of memories, nostalgia, and stories from older generations (xxiii). Many of *Adios, Happy Homeland!*'s characters embody these exact experiences.

“The Boy Who Fell from Heaven”

In “The Boy Who Fell from Heaven,” written by the protagonist himself, Laika Almeida (named after Menéndez’s real-life cousin) recounts his experience of stowing away in the landing gear on an American Airlines Boeing 737 leaving Havana, Cuba, and heading to Miami. In the introduction, there are three brief summaries of real-world examples of Cubans trying escape the island using this method. Most have tragic endings. In the case of Laika, he miraculously evades death with the use of a “flight suit,” which helps him land softly in the warm water, just off the coast of Florida (160).



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After stripping to his swimming trunks, he manages to paddle ashore without drawing attention. “Teletransported to this future, this alternate Cuba where history went right instead of left,” Laika expresses both fear and awe as he absent-mindedly wanders around the city (162).

The protagonist eventually settles down in Miami and finds steady work in the landscaping business. However, he grows aggravated with the incessant questions from Miami residents wanting to know “details of his biography” and about his escape from Havana – something Laika cannot explain nor is interested in providing (166). He states, “There were no reasons and an infinite number of them, but he could not list them for the men. To do so would consume their entire lives; and what would they understand anyway of flight? Their notions of escape were the crudest kind” (166). In comparison, Laika embraces his view of escape as “tiny and joyful” and is happy to leave it “inexpressible” (167). Miami’s invasion by the whitefly, a secondary narrative and obvious allusion to the mass ingress of Cubans into the city, wears on Laika who decides to quit his landscaping job and pick up kite surfing. This elegant manner of taking, or retaking, flight eventually leads to the protagonist’s escape once again, this time from Miami, “[l]ong after Liaka’s figure had disappeared into the mists of distance,



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a speck of gold remained in the sky[...]"(170). The reader can only imagine Laika's new destination, but would be surprised if it were not Cuba.

While many Cuban-American authors use the voyage as a prominent theme in their narratives, the trip usually heads in one route: from the US to Cuba and often back again. Menéndez, however, reverses the situation in the case of Laika. Envisioning this trip from the "opposite" perspective allows for discussions of home, and the experience of loss for all Cubans both on and off the island. This approach equalizes the playing field and questions the stereotypical Miami Cuban-American socio-political standing. Although she recycles the theme of escape, Menéndez addresses something new by flipping the direction and giving voice to Cubans escaping the island. In other words, the desire of escape is a commonality, not a distinguishing characteristic. Maybe it is not a Cuban-American disposition, but a human one? The narrator underscores this very idea, stating "He [Laika] fled not a place, but a condition" (161).

"Un Cuento Extraño"

Turning to a second noteworthy story in the collection, namely "Un Cuento Extraño," Menéndez takes her playfulness a step further by including a selection completely written in Spanish. Penned by Nitza Pol-Villa, which is a last name reversal



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of Nitza Villapol (1923-98), the “Cuban Julia Child,” this short story tips the typical Cuban-American narrative on its head. A seemingly lighthearted reference to Menéndez’s short story “In Cuba I was a German Shepherd,” Pol-Villa recounts an afternoon with friends Michael and Phillip chatting over sandwiches and beer in a small restaurant in Havana, Cuba. The two protagonists express a longing for their “tierra lejana,” Bergen County, New Jersey, after having escaped their homeland (US) years ago (197). Like Laika (and many other characters in this collection), they also have the unique experience of “flying,” in this case as parachutists while serving in the Vietnam War. Particularly, Phillip’s ability to defy gravity during the war (“la sensación de estar suspendido sobre la tierra”), if only for a few minutes, seems to still haunt him in the present: “Y aún hoy, tantos años después de su última y desastrosa misión, a veces despertaba con la certidumbre de que el futuro avanzaba hacía él mientras él quedaba suspendido en un presente perpetuo” (199). Here, the reader discerns an apparent reference to Rivero’s “dislocated TransCuban” or O’Reilly Herrera’s “unbelonging” but from the imaginary alternate universe where exiled US citizens are living in Cuba and speaking a language that makes no sense. Phillip ponders, “¿Por qué hablamos en castellano, cuando la lengua de ambos es el inglés?” (201).



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Interestingly, the justification they conjure up for speaking Spanish instead of English is “para la que escribe el cuento” (201). It is not clear if Phillip and Michael are referring to the invented author, Pol-Villa, or the omnipotent Menéndez. Here, there are multiple layers of escape, since at the most basic level the readers observe Phillip and Michael’s exile and subsequent melancholy (due to the desire to return) after escaping their homeland, but flipped upside down: the north is now the south (very similar to Laika’s situation). But even more remarkable is Menéndez’s own attempt at a personal escape from the very literary and critical bonds that have labeled her as a diasporic Cuban-American woman writer. The collection of short stories is primarily written in English – a common characteristic of diasporic Cuban-American literature – but Menéndez pushes the boundaries by including a text in Spanish that is supposedly written for English speakers (she does provide an English translation on her website). Throughout this entire collection, the true author hides herself and removes all responsibility from the creation of the text. Her name does appear in the contributors’ notes, but her biography states that she is “the pseudonym of an imaginary writer and translator, invented, if not to lend coherence to this collection, at least to offer it the pretense of contemporary relevance” (264). In other words, Menéndez makes the effort



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to “escape” from her own literary space and shed accountability by creating fictional authors/editor. In doing so, she adds to and plays with the ubiquitous theme appearing throughout the text.

In summary, Menéndez re-examines questions of homeland and the bonds imposed by social, political, and literary forces. In the end, her characters cannot successfully escape their situation since a longing for return is inevitable for the Cuban exile. Moreover, I believe that Menéndez, in some fashion, attempts to stage her own personal escape by wrapping herself within and, at the same time, omitting herself from the twisted and circular structure of the very work she authors.

King of Cuba

Of all the female Cuban-American novelists who published in the 1990s and early 2000s, Cristina García is undoubtedly one of the most prolific and well known. Like Menéndez, García was a successful journalist who turned to writing fiction. Her first novel, *Dreaming in Cuban* (1992), received critical acclaim and was nominated for the National Book Award. Since then, she has published extensively, including various novels that focus on Cuba, migration, and the diaspora, such as *The Aguero Sisters* (1996), *Monkey Hunting* (2003), and *A Handbook to Luck* (2007). Born in Havana in 1958,



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García spent the first two years of her life in Cuba before her parents decided to move to the United States after Castro's rise to power. Since she left the island at such an early age, the author has no real memories of Cuba; however, this lack of memory has "shaped her academic interests and pervades her writing, where memory is a constant motif" (Irizarry 175). Due to her early exile, García could be aptly labeled as part of the younger 1.5 generation, but shares a similar relationship with Cuba as Menéndez and the second-generation Cuban-Americans or ABCs. In a 2007 interview, she proclaims "For me, growing up in an exile home with very anticommunist parents meant that I had a very limited notion of what Cuba and Cuban history meant" (Irizarry 178). Yet her travels to Cuba as an adult, particularly a trip she made in 2011, have often allowed García to access voices that both confirm and contest the unofficial histories of the Cuban Diaspora (Rivera).

Published in 2013, *King of Cuba* in some ways follows in the footsteps of García's previous works, but decisively highlights how an era is slowly coming to an end. The novel focuses on two mirror image figures: a Castro-like character referred to as El Comandante, or Maximum Lider, and the octogenarian Goyo Herrera, whose accounts are intertwined and woven into a narrative with a "kaleidoscopic chorus of voices that



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defy censorship and refute the official story” (Ortuzar-Young, 378). Unlike *Dreaming in Cuban* and *The Aguero Sisters*, the protagonists in *King of Cuba* are men approaching the end of their complicated lives. In short, by creating voices from both on and off the island, García allows the reader to experience the passions and perceptions of two unique Cubas.

Goyo Herrera

Like *Adios Happy Homeland!*, *King of Cuba*'s narrative structure is somewhat obscure, bouncing between settings in Cuba and the United States and incorporating a chorus of unofficial voices. However, the underlying theme is of Goyo and El Comandante recounting and reflecting on their lives, families, and unresolved or unreachable goals. The reader is first introduced to El Comandante, who resides in Havana, and is struggling to accept the realities of his condition: old age. Like the city itself, El Comandante's body is in decay. His diet has had to change, as he now eats dry toast and oatmeal: “What he wouldn't give right now for a porterhouse steak and three friend eggs, over easy, followed by a double scotch” (5). Ninety miles away, in Miami, Goyo's physical condition at eighty-six is not much better: “Goyo Herrera wasn't afraid to die, but he was tired of waiting for death. Waiting for the body to shut down, organ



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by organ, accruing its critical mass of toxins and blockages” (9). The constant juxtaposition of these two men continues throughout García’s novel, as the narrative shifts between the two countries, and, by extension, between representations of both real and imagined space.

Due to the limitations of this article, I will focus mainly on Goyo Herrera and his noteworthy diasporic condition. *King of Cuba’s* protagonist, or antagonist depending on the reader’s political lens, is livid and wants revenge for what El Comandante has done to him: “It wasn’t for politics alone that Goyo would’ve murdered that swaggering cock but for his mistreatment of the woman Goyo had loved above all others: Adelina Ponti[...].” (11). His mission, before dying, is to kill his nemesis: “His fixation with ending the tyrant’s life had begun to consume Goyo day and night. The thought that he could die a hero tantalized him, probably more than it should” (11). Goyo who is an example of a first-generation Cuban immigrant, remembers his homeland vividly by describing its richness in natural resources and his father’s successful shipping line. After the Herrera family flees from Cuba after the Revolution, Goyo flourishes as a businessman, owning and running the Minimax Café and living off of the proceeds of a rental property in New York City. Nevertheless, like El Comandante, the octogenarian



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is unsatisfied and unhappy. His son, Goyito, is addicted to drugs and sugary food and his estranged daughter, Alina, does not share his political and social ideology. Yet, along with his desire to outlive the tyrant, El Comandante, it is the profound sadness of living in exile that marks Goyo's sentiment: "For him, true heaven was the precious memory of his youth, of the earthly paradise he'd lost. Cuba had been his birthright, his home, and it'd been taken away from him – brutally, eternally" (51).

Now, at the end of his life, Goyo incessantly reflects on a series of old memories of Havana, "where Goyo's youth remained trapped" (20). The narrator aptly describes his sentiment: "To remember all this was a heart-searing misery, but sometimes remembering was all Goyo could do. The litany rarely varied" (38). While visiting his late wife's grave, he contemplates, "So many heartbroken exiles were buried here, dreaming with their last breath of returning home to a free Cuba" (51). In one of the novel's most powerful scenes, Goyo's Cadillac is hit by a speeding car and he is raced to the hospital in an ambulance. As he grows drowsy from the sedatives, Goyo begins to dream lucidly, "A tropical island floated into view, chalked with cumulus clouds. He longed to reach it, but there was no cliff to leap off, no sea to traverse. Then, as if propelled by a giant spring, Goyo found himself streaking through the clouds like a



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cannonball. Coño, I'm flying, he thought loud enough to hear" (85). Just like Menéndez's Laika and Phillip, García's character takes "flight" as he is transported just close enough to perceive the tropical island, but too far away to reach it.

In her book *Impossible Returns: Narratives of the Cuban Diaspora*, Iraida H. López draws on a wealth of transnational and diasporic studies to examine the understudied subject of return in Cuban-American narratives. Due to the diasporic Cuban community's atypical relationship with their home country, López even questions terminology, such as transnationalism, that has been broadly applied to Cubans living abroad. She argues that unlike Puerto Rican and Dominican migrations, the Cuban diaspora flows and migration patterns tend to move in one direction: outwards, away from the island. She states that since "Cuban Americans are allowed to return only for short visits," they "have little choice but to opt for provisional or imagined rather than repatriated return[s]" (13). Echoing observations from Antonio Benítez-Rojo's *The Repeating Island* and Yolanda Flores' "Un paso hacia adelante, dos pasos hacia atrás," López also maintains that Cuban-American narratives tend to "advance while simultaneously walking backward" and that writers such as Menéndez and García "look south, toward the island, as a source of inspiration to explore the past" (López



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165). Throughout García's novel, the reader bears witness to Goyo's constant, yet impossible return to Cuba. Unlike Laika's physical voyages in "The Boy Who Fell from Heaven," Goyo's journeys are constructed out of fractured memories and dreamlike sequences that reoccur in his mind as an imagined space, an imagined return to the island.

Moreover, as a first-generation Cuban immigrant, Goyo does not resemble many of García's semi-autobiographical or alter-ego protagonists (like *Dreaming in Cuban's* Pilar); however, I suggest that he still plays a fundamental role in the author's interplay of real and imagined space and in her own personal desire to return to or connect with Cuba. To elaborate, during the middle of one of Goyo's feverish dreams, one of the unofficial voices in *King of Cuba* interrupts the narrative flow to add her perspective. The brief interlude, entitled "Cacharro Chino," is penned by "C.G., novelist" and describes a flashback to when she, "Pilar," and "Linda" were driving from Havana to Trinidad in a dilapidated rental car (163). The reader can assume that "C.G." is, in fact, the author of the novel and that Pilar and Linda are her daughter and her friend and fellow academic and Cuban scholar, Dr. Linda Howe. Unlike Menéndez, who uses *Adios, Happy Homeland!* as a strategic puzzle to question the tendencies of escape and



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return in diasporic Cuban-American literature, García employs a different technique, namely adding layers of fictional and real voices, including her own, to re-examine how representations of space both on and off of the island play a fundamental role in Cuban-American literature.

Conclusion

In “The Boy Who Fell from Heaven,” Laika, like many desperate, real-life Cubans (especially the *balseros* during the 1990s), takes an enormous risk of escaping his homeland. His probable return to the island might confuse the reader at first, considering the effort it took him to escape. As much as he might try, Laika never completely escapes his homeland. His ability to soar among the clouds or disappear via kite surfing does not diminish the constant calling or beckoning of the elusive island. In many ways, Laika’s escape only underscores the necessity of his return since he experiences exile in Miami first hand. In “Un Cuento Extraño,” Menéndez plays with the traditional dilemma that appears in Cuban-American literature by creating an alternate universe where US citizens are exiled to Cuba. While the basic premise of the story speaks to the inability to truly escape a physical space, it also highlights



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Menéndez's deeper meta-commentary of her own disposition: the perpetual escape of the Cuban-American author.

As I have noted, Menéndez attempts to break boundaries that encapsulate her previous works, such as including a text completely written in Spanish. In her 2011 interview, she admits, "Yes, this book (*Adios*) about departures, is its own kind of departure...I wanted something new, something that would liberate and delight me..."

(2). Despite her attempt, I believe that the author cannot completely escape the socio-political and literary bonds that categorize her. Even with its playful approach and post-modern use of literary devices, *Adios Happy Homeland!* is still struggling with similar themes found in Menéndez's previous works and other texts from the Cuban-American cannon. Is she perhaps underscoring the point that she cannot and will never escape them? Menéndez concludes that "the 'real' author, trying to escape Cuba, finds herself curating yet another book in debt to its traditions" (3).

Likewise, García's *King of Cuba* also portrays the intimate dance between two Cubas by using representations of both real and imagined spaces. The protagonists, El Comandante and Goyo, are symbols of a dying generation and underscore the end of a significant era in Cuban and Cuban-American history. By focusing on Goyo's desires to



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remember and return to his imagined Cuba and then comparing them to the country's reality (via El Comandante and the chorus of unofficial voices), García highlights the constant pull of the island for many Cuban-Americans. Even though Goyo would be labeled as a first-generation Cuban-American, his comportment mimics what Lopéz and others have observed in attempted returns by 1.5 and second-generation Cuban immigrants. His voyage is imagined and dream-like rather than repatriated and thus underscores the impossibility of a fulfilling return to his home country.

Moreover, unlike Menéndez's seeming desire to escape her own work, *King of Cuba's* author actively participates in the narrative along with the unofficial voices. By including her own voice as part of the fictional space and dialogue, García similarly underscores her own inability to escape the personal and literary bonds that tie her to the elusive island. However, as *King of Cuba* suggests, the era of first-generation Cuban-Americans is slowly coming to an end and perhaps García senses these changes as an opportunity to question their somewhat binary approach to the Cuban Revolution and the Castro regime.

Ruth Behar and Lucia M. Suarez's latest work might clarify Menéndez's and García's conundrum as they speak to a "Post-Bridges" sentiment for many diasporic



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Cubans (6). Behar reminds us that “[t]o be Cuban is to understand that the island travels with you” and that Cuba has become portable (7). Returning to the lens of Duany’s bifocality and Méndez Rodenas’ refracted images, I believe that these two literary works from Menéndez and García concentrate on real and imagined spaces and returns so as to underline their protagonists’ exploration of transnational identity and dual frames of reference. In addition, the authors’ own personal travels between Cuba and the United States allow for the inclusion of semi-autobiographical references that push the reader to consider the larger context of Cuban-American art and literature. In other words, perhaps it is impossible for Menéndez and García to completely remove themselves from their work and that they, like their fictional counter-parts, inhabit Duany’s “cultural borders” and endure the condition of perpetual flight (2).

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