The Silence of the Mother Tongue and the Ghosts of Ana Menéndez

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Abstract

What are the borders of identity for U.S. Cuban heritage writers such as Ana Menéndez? In contrast to the writers of the 1.5 generation, for the U.S. writers of Cuban heritage, such as Ana Menéndez the native language is often not available and yet it remains as a trace that cannot be erased. Through the study of representative short stories in which the protagonists experience what Ana Menéndez describes as "the silence of the mother tongue," my reading will consider the concept of liminality as an interpretative rubric or an enabling condition to study the experience of language loss. My focus on the limen as the imagined space (physical or psychological) where most of these stories evolve, will hopefully amplify our understanding of Menéndez's poetics, since the liminal experience allows the writer to express emotional states that are impossible to represent otherwise.

Keywords: Miami English, silenced mother tongue, borders of identity, liminality, language loss, bilingual writer, U.S., language hybridity, 1.5 generation, post-memory, interstitial space

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Resumen

¿Cuáles son los bordes de la identidad para los escritores nacidos en los Estados Unidos de padres cubanos tales como Ana Menéndez? En contraste con los escritores de la generación 1.5, quienes se expresan y pueden optar por escribir sus obras en un idioma u otro para los escritores nacidos en los EE.UU. de padres cubanos, el idioma español no siempre está disponible como lengua creativa. Sin embargo muchos de ellos –tales como Ana Menéndez– conservan ese idioma dentro de ellos mismos como marca indeleble y difícil de borrar. Mi lectura de cuentos representativos de Ana Menéndez en los cuales los protagonistas experimentan lo que Menéndez llama "el silencio de la lengua materna", se vale del concepto de la liminalidad como rúbrica interpretativa que nos ayuda a comprender la experiencia de la pérdida del primer idioma. Mi enfoque en el limen o umbral como el espacio imaginado (físico o psicológico) donde la mayoría de estos cuentos se desarrollan espera ampliar nuestra comprensión de la poética de escritores de herencia cubana [y latina] ya que, al situar a los personajes en situaciones transitorias o ambiguas, Menéndez puede expresar sentimientos que de otra manera serían imposibles de recrear o representar en sus escritos.

Palabras clave: el inglés de Miami, la lengua materna silenciada, las fronteras de la identidad, la pérdida del idioma, escritor bilingüe, hibridad lingüística, la generación 1.5, espacio intersticial

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> English is the language in which I think, dream, pray and count, and imagine. Spanish is a stunted dwarf with magical powers. But certain words in Spanish get to the core of my soul as no English word can.
>
> Carlos Eire

In "Miami English," a panel presentation that took place at Florida International University in February 2016, Ana Menéndez described the linguistic tangles of her generation –children born in the U.S. of Cuban parents– who grew up in Miami during the 1980s: "If exile, as Joseph Brodsky famously observed, is a linguistic event, then those of us who are sons and daughters of exile were living in the linguistic aftermath." Growing up as an adolescent in a city of immigrants, Menéndez explained the in-between situation of her group of peers, who found themselves in

the middle of a "collision of the two worlds we had inherited." The author's remarks expressed nostalgia regarding a time when Spanish became the unifying language between her and her contemporaries who grew up together at a particular time in a particular place." She mentions with affection the works of "tribal elder" Roberto Fernández, whose *Raining Backwards* (1988) had been written in a coded English mostly available to bilingual Cuban Americans, yet a book in which Spanish did more "than lurk behind our English constructions becoming something else." In similar fashion, it seems Ana and her friends had been communicating in a language which was mostly for insiders, a mix of English and Spanish that only her cohorts would understand. Menéndez lamented with certain nostalgia that, as the years passed, this English adaptation of Cuban Spanish –which for her peers had been so important in establishing a sense of identity for the group– was in the midst of disappearing. In fact, Menéndez observed, the Spanish language had become for all of them, "the ghostly language lurking behind our English constructions." Raised in one language but living in the world of another, Menéndez shared with the audience her complicated relationship with her childhood language, stating that "a mother tongue connects us to creation. It both shapes and is shaped by the speaker's understanding of reality."[1] It is remarkable that a U.S. writer of Cuban heritage such as Menéndez, who writes exclusively in English, would seek to define her generation in terms of their relationship to the Spanish language.

"Miami English" is one of several essays that Menéndez would write on the subject of language. Consider the introduction to "The Bilingual Imagination," a previous article published in 2011*:*

> My first memory is about language. I'm two years old and being carried by my mother. She is holding me in one arm and with the other is opening the freezer. "Esto se llama hielo," she says, taking out a tray of ice. "Así es como se dice amarillo en Inglés." This is called ice. That is how you say 'yellow' in English. (2011: 3)

The essay –playful and serious at times– ruminates on the nature of language in general as it acknowledges its subjectivity and its dual power to create but also to destroy. The piece is of interest not only for what it says about language, but because Menéndez attributes her skeptical view of reality to the fact of being bilingual. In this essay, the author maintains that speaking more than one language confirmed for her the existence of multiple truths and perspectives, a sensibility evident in all of her fictional works:

> If the idea of certainty was never resolved for me, its pursuit became a constant in my work. In this way, writing was a kind of problem solving. So I wrote stories about memories that later come into doubt, or turn out to be gentle fabrications… Through all of them, the real protagonist is language: shifting and imprecise. (2011: 4)

A second essay, published a year later, "Are We Different People in Different Languages?" (2015), pursues similar ideas, this time from a pedagogical perspective. As a teacher of creative writing for multilingual students, Professor Menéndez asked her pupils to translate the stories they had written for class –originally in English– into their native language. She relates that this was a difficult assignment for some of them, commenting on the case of the Latvian student who could not bring himself to finish the assignment because Latvian, his native language, was "too sweet and innocent" for the gritty, dark content of the story he had written in English. Language, in particular a writer's native language, Menéndez avers, "communicates our deepest levels back to us." Menéndez's essays on language, compelling in their own right, reveal a writer both fascinated but also haunted by the fact that Spanish would remain inaccessible to her creative endeavors. Thus, it is not surprising that the author's short fiction will return with insistence to the theme of a silenced mother tongue, featuring protagonists who mourn in different ways their lack of access to their first language.

What are the borders of identity for heritage writers such as Menéndez? Through the study of representative short stories in which the protagonists experience what she describes as "the silence of the mother tongue," my reading will consider the concept of liminality as an interpretative rubric or an enabling condition to study the experience of language loss. My focus on the limen as the imagined space (physical or psychological) where most of these stories evolve, will hopefully amplify our understanding of Menéndez's poetics, since the liminal experience allows the writer to express states that are impossible to represent otherwise. As we shall see, the sense of loss of the first language for heritage writers such as Menéndez is much greater than imagined.

1. A POETICS OF LIMINALITY

Derived from the Latin word for "limen," which means threshold in anthropology, liminality signals a passage, a time of transition that in the primitive tribes was known as rites of passage. The concept was made popular at the beginning of the 20th century in the field of anthropology by Van Gennep (1909) and later taken up and expanded by Victor Turner in the 1960s.[2] In their introduction to *Breaking*

Boundaries, Agnes Horvath, Bjørn Thomassen and Harald Wydra write that liminality "captures in-between situations and conditions characterized by the dislocation of established structures, the reversal of hierarchies and the uncertainty of outcomes" (2). And while Turner's original definition considered liminality mostly as a temporary condition, recent studies by Arpad Szakolczai (141) and also by Phillip Schlesinger (45) have expanded the usefulness of this concept by observing that liminality in cases such as the immigrant or exile is not a temporary condition and remains a permanent state.

In literary studies, liminality can be a useful tool for understanding the affective dimension of bilingual, hybrid or polylingual protagonists as represented in fiction. Cuban American poet and literary critic Gustavo Pérez Firmat applied the concept to works from a variety of epochs and genres in his pioneering *Literature and Liminality* (1986). Years later, in his essay collection *Tongue Ties* (2003), the critic would continue his study of the liminal condition, this time focusing on the affective dimension of liminality in bilingual writers. Yet his best expression of liminality was not through his critical or theoretical work, but through his own performance as a bilingual creative writer. In a short book of personal vignettes by the title of *Cincuenta lecciones de exilio y desexilio* (2000), Pérez Firmat explored the theme of cultural and linguistic crossings through a combination of lyric and prose poems, aphorisms and anecdotes. Rather than celebrating bilingualism and biculturalism as the author had proclaimed in his previous work, the short essays in this book present language hybridity as an obstacle and as a challenge for artistic creativity. These essays explore how English and Spanish are seen as different manners of perceiving life and how such linguistic differences produce great anxiety for the author, who laments that both languages and cultures live simultaneously inside him. As a result, the choice of a creative language becomes a dueling match between the two languages that live inside the writer.

In contrast to the writers of the 1.5 generation, for the U.S. writers of Cuban heritage such as Ana Menéndez, the native language is often not available and yet it remains within them as a trace they cannot erase. Thus, in their creative works, we can often find characters who reside in a linguistic borderland that can be best understood through the critical lens of liminality. In "The Politics of Misremembering" (2007), Andrea Herrera –a U.S. born writer and literary critic of Cuban heritage– describes the creative paradox of her generation:

> Some of us […] have constructed an idea of a lost ancestral "home" in the interstitial space between history and dreams, and on the shifting sands of nostalgia and memory […].

> And yet, for many, the emphasis is not so much on locating "home" but on the process of "voyaging" between identities and worlds; in other words, the journey is "home." (O'Reilly 179, 183)

Herrera mourns that the literary contributions of her generation –which she labels after Hemingway's *The Lost Generation*– had until recently been basically ignored. In this pioneering article, the author demands recognition and defends the right of heritage Cuban writers to have their works be considered part of the Cuban American corpus observing that: "the generations born or raised in diaspora represent one of the dispersed nation's primary grounds for cultural survival and renewal" (187).[3] Heritage writers such as Ana Menéndez, Cecilia Rodriguez Milanés, Jeanine Capó-Crucet and Chantel Acevedo have reimagined the vocabulary of literary tropes in order to give expression and form to their inherited experience of exile and diaspora.

2. "WE ARE OUR OWN GHOSTS DRAGGING OUR MOURNFUL PASTS"

"Ghosts," Ana Menéndez' most recent short story (2016), develops the author's concern for the loss of the native or maternal language. In this story, the suicide of 21 year-old Yuliani, a recent Cuban immigrant who lived in Florida, brings back painful thoughts for the protagonist narrator, Anna Kralova. When Anna returns to the suicide scene –which had been her former apartment (rented by Yuliani)– she finds a pack of letters in his closet that come from his mother. Anna is fascinated by the story told in the letters and, as she reads, she identifies further with the victim. In fact Kralova, herself an immigrant from the Czech Republic, discovers many parallels between her own life and Yuliani's. The suicide incident at the center of the story and Anna's reading of the young man's letters provoke regret in the protagonist for having left her own country: "now she is some in-between thing, diminished." At the story's conclusion the found letters –and Kralova's reordering of such letters– allow the protagonist to confront her own ghosts: "The foreign country is here, Anna thinks. She is the foreign country […]. Anna does not believe in ghosts […] we are our own ghosts dragging our mournful pasts." Thus the ghostly presence in the victim's apartment becomes for the protagonist "not a haunting, but an echo."

The ghosts in this story become a metaphor for a life lived somewhere else and away from the native country. In Kralova's experience ghosts become a lingering present evoking melancholia, longing, distance, and aloneness. Menéndez plays with the traditional concept of specters and phantom steps as their absent/present quality is achieved through the light and shadows that permeate Gianni's apartment. When

Anna decides to take photos of the now empty apartment, shadows emerge which recall the presence of real ghosts. Ghosts become a liminal presence in the story since by being neither dead nor alive they inhabits an in-between zone also reflected in the emotions of Anna, the protagonist.

Central to Anna Kralova's concerns is the absence of Czech in her daily life. The character reminisces about her childhood and remembers her visit to her mother's village in Slovakia. Being able to remember this incident allows her to enter the world of her childhood: "And that memory loosens others. They come rushing back to Anna in her native tongue." The idea of English as the only language available to the creative writer is present in Kralova's nostalgic monologue as we witness her linguistic frustration: "the present was a tyrant who only spoke English." Only the first language allows the protagonist to fully remember: "the loss of her childhood language, the acquisition of a new one, has altered the topography of memory." According to Marianne Hirsch and other theorists of post-memory, for heritage artists such as Menéndez, the subject is not the history of their elder's exile so much as how the young writers came to know it and how it has shaped their work.[4] Anna Kralova's recollections entailed a reconstruction as well as a mediation of memories, since the absent native language became an obstacle in accessing her past. In order to convey this ambiguity, the author uses additional tropes of liminality such as the threshold in Yuliani's apartment, but also conceptual ones since the native language is depicted as a portal to memories which are otherwise unavailable.

Language, as Menéndez writes in her essays, can be a double-edged sword because it can be manipulated and distorted. This is illustrated when, still in Prague working as an interpreter for the government, Anna is asked to mistranslate the Czech language for the Americans involved in the westernization of Prague after 1989. It turns out that her bosses want to take advantage of their American clients: "all we want is their money." The author explores the concept of *intrahistoria* as Eastern Europeans are described as the people caught inside historical events beyond their control: "that is what it was like to live inside great changes […]. History is experienced in miniature."

Through the theme of language, the author also manages to blend the political angle of the story with the meditation on a fragmented identity. To that end, the author's introduction of untranslated sentences in the Czech language comes at perfect moments and produces the desired disorienting effect (the reader senses the meaning without having to translate the words). Issues of immigration and politics, common to all affected countries, become the backdrop of this story: "those who made it, who didn't, who got out, who stayed behind." Menéndez transposes the trauma of the

Eastern European immigrant in order to gain distance from the Cuban case as well as to show the universality of the theme of immigrants who are forced to live far from home. The Prague of 1989 also recalls the situation of Havana today as this city is currently inundated with corporate, national and international attention. "The ghosts are inside us," writes Anna. In fact, the ghosts of Anna Kralova not only become the memories we carry with us (such as in the 1.5 generation) but also the memories that heritage speakers cannot access.

3. *ADIOS, HAPPY HOMELAND!*

Written within the realm of the liminal, *Adios Happy Homeland!* (2011) contains stories about characters that are in transitional situations, forever travelling and moving from one place to the other. In fact stories of constant leaving and escaping dominate these tales: wings, parachutes, balloons and railroad terminals. Several tales in *Adios Happy Homeland!* are structured through the metaphor of the train journey. These are pieces that are dark and reflective of life itself in which the character's need to flee is centered in escaping into the interior self as she faces the dilemma of language loss. Through these ghostly journeys, Menéndez seems to occupy the mind of the immigrant as an interstitial space that fluctuates between life and death, escape and return, sleep and wakefulness, or even signals the spaces between Spanish and English through the process of translation. In these pieces we find physical thresholds but most importantly existential ones that call the reader's attention, not only to the Cuban story of exile, but also to the writer's struggle to understand the ongoing effects of an inherited but lost linguistic past. Writer and critic Amy Letter aptly summarizes the essence of Menéndez's collection in her review of *Adios Happy Homeland!*: "While [*Adios Happy Homeland!*] makes frequent reference to past works, it scrambles fact and fiction, personal and public; it re-employs others' characters and even historical persons freely, uses quotes in new contexts, and generally plays with the landscape of the literary lights, rather than record or defend them" (2013: 2). There is indeed much variety, since Menéndez's book is presented to the reader as an anthology of fictional works written by Cuban poets whose names vaguely resemble luminaries such as Alex Carpenter [Alejo Carpentier], Joseph Martin [José Martí], etc. The editor's name, Heberto Quain, pays homage to author Jorge Luis Borges's own fictional character, the critic Hebert Quain from his tale "A Survey of the Works of Hebert Quain."

The stories in Heberto Quain's fictional anthology are written in a variety of styles: some are experimental poems; some make fun of Google mechanized translations from Spanish to English, while others are philosophical tales that both connect to the

main narrative but also can stand alone. These tales approach the subject of language from a variety of perspectives tonalities and styles. At times they are a reflection on the Cuban literary tradition, others are metafictional, while some entail a serious self-questioning where protagonists reside in a psychotic borderland. Together these interrelated pieces become a kind of *Ars Poetica* as they allow the writer to reflect creatively on how language affects identity. Menéndez's collection also dialogues with Borges asking the reader to pay attention to appropriation, not as imitation, but rather as an avenue to creatively convey her place among writers of Cuban heritage. Heberto Quain is also Ana Menéndez, a merging and a blend of an artist who is also her own critic.[5]

4. "IF ONLY HE COULD THINK WITHOUT WORDS"

"The Poet in His Labyrinth" (*Adios Happy Homeland!* 2011: 171-179) is a fantastical story that takes place in an imagined universe, a kind of limbo in which spatial tropes of liminality such as crossroads, thresholds and crossings lead the character to an unknown destiny. The story also conveys what we might call psychological liminality, since sleep and wakefulness structure the poet's journey toward his own death. Throughout the tale, the English language seems to be a controlling force over the character: "He ordered himself to think in Spanish, but the order itself was delivered in English" (2011: 173). Moreover, his life without Spanish is described as "all of these years without speech" as the English language is described as a "tyrant" who had full control over his life (176).

As the story begins, Menéndez protagonist wakes up in "the viscous borderland of sleep" […] some kind of purgatory, a great waiting room in some train station he could not describe" (2011: 174). It is not clear where the story takes place but the poet's nightmare takes him to strange dark spaces with long corridors and crossroads ending in an enormous train station. Finding himself in a disorienting and timeless setting he does not fully understand, the poet protagonist realizes that things are very unusual: "he had woken on the other side of something" (173). The space in which the poet moves is ambivalent and fluid, a kind of punishing waiting room or limbo in which the protagonist must confront the despair of chronological time. Soon he realizes that he is in the process of dying and that life is "flowing out of him" (174). Sadly, the poet could not comprehend his own native language although he could now sense its rhythm and was "overcome by nostalgia: an ancient memory of his mother" (176-177). In the last lines of the story, the poet is violently led away by people who yell at him in a Spanish he no longer understands. He responds without anger with a phrase in English that is

taken from Ana Menéndez's novel, *Loving Che* (2003) as the author inserts herself in the narrative: "there are affections of such delicate honesty."

As the passing from life to death and the protagonist's inability to express his thoughts in Spanish turn into one and the same, liminality becomes an effective poetic device for representing the emotions of a bilingual writer as he experiences moments of instability and confusion: "What malevolent spirit was filling his mind with foreign words?" (2011: 176). The story –which reminds us of the ambivalent and dark atmosphere created originally in Borges's "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertious"– departs from its source of inspiration by presenting a character who deeply mourns for his native language. By focusing on the character's linguistic confusion the reader can appreciate how the liminal setting of a story may provide a means for imagining the dilemma of a writer who longed for a language that was no longer available to him.[6]

5. "EVERYONE HERE IS AN EMIGRANT"

The liminal state can be physical as in "The Poet In His Labyrinth," but also it can be a confrontation with the self's own dark side. "The Shunting Trains Trace Iron Labyrinths" (*Adios Happy Homeland!* 2011: 251-261), is a story that carries an epigraph from Borges and is penned by a fictional poet by the name of Ana Menéndez. Told in the first person, the story depicts a surreal world that takes place in a station yard with infinite trains coming and going and where the announcements are made "in three languages none of which I understood" (2011: 253). Throughout the tale, the protagonist hears echoes of screams and yet her own voice cannot be heard and no one seems to respond to her many questions. Only Gertrude, a random travel companion, provides strange information that contributes to the narrator's confusion: "all the stories are the same we are always leaving […]. Everyone here is an emigrant" (254-256).

Both the literal voyage of the immigrant and an imagined voyage onto death seem to coincide in Menéndez world, and they are described as "a stumble and silence," leaving the reader unsure whether the story is taking place in limbo or in hell. The unnamed protagonist shares aspects of her past with the reader as she tries to make sense of what is happening to her: "I too had been traveling for years […]. I woke up one morning to realize that all about me was void, that it was I who had invented sound, light, color, love, shame… The world was an illusion, sustained by my need to make it whole" (2011: 254-255). To further her confusion, Menéndez inserts additional fragments of stories in which the fate of unknown characters coincides in their existential despair with the protagonist's predicament, including the tale

of the nameless couple whose love is destroyed by the man's pursuit of perfection: "Like all of us, he began his life with hope. And then in the middle of it, he begins to take it all down, piece by piece" (2011: 259). Soon the bedazzled protagonist realizes that perhaps she will never reach her destination. The story concludes with the protagonist still in transit to an unknown landscape of death: "we were only passing through a wilderness of mirrors, startling ourselves on the way back to the beginning" (260).

According to Arpad Szakolczai, the liminal can be not only a transitional phase but also a permanent condition (141) and this is precisely what happens in "The Shunting Trains Trace Iron Labyrinths." Here time takes on the shape of nightmarish tales which create a feeling of atemporality, a nightmarish scenario of the infinite well described by Gertrude: "some of us have been traveling for years and we still don't know" (Menéndez 2011: 254). Reminiscent of Borges's "The South," Menéndez reinvents the original Borges story by making the journey of the immigrant remain in a permanent state of uncertainty and ambivalence, a liminal state which also includes the protagonist's absent language.

In "The Express" (*Adios Happy Homeland!* 2011: 127-137), another train journey, the liminal is present as the character confronts the space between life and death and the fragility of life in general. While there are no language concerns, the journey features a middle aged woman who returns from work to home on a train and soon becomes an anguished meditation on life's purpose: "her husband had warned her about the thinking problem" (132). This time someone has committed suicide on the train tracks. The protagonist's existential musings are about the tension between happiness and existential despair: "and then she could understand this young man [who committed suicide], understand how close happiness lies to the precipice" (135).[7] Her meditations and the story itself end when she finally arrives home, her thoughts still hovering between her anguish about the mystery of existence and her acceptance of her monotonous life: "Was this really the best of all possible worlds or were there others, just beyond our reach*?* (67).

6. "¿POR QUÉ HABLAMOS EN CASTELLANO?"

Written in a much lighter mood, "Un cuento extraño" (*Adios Happy Homeland!* 2011: 197-202), the only story written in Spanish in this book of interrelated tales, is a dialogue between two characters who wonder why they are speaking in Spanish when they are from New Jersey. Phillip and Michael are American exiles living in the Caribbean who, after many years away from their native country, seem to have

forgotten the English language and prefer to communicate in Spanish. During their conversation, Phillip asks his friend, "¿Por qué hablamos en castellano cuando la lengua de ambos es el inglés?" Michael answers: "[P]ara nosotros no tiene sentido… Para la que escribe el cuento quizás" (2011: 201). Nostalgic for the old country, "las grandes avenidas y floreadas vistas de su tierra lejana, Bergen County, New Jersey" (197), Phillip is also frustrated because he is unable to translate a document written in English, his first language.

"Un cuento extraño" plays with the idea of linguistic displacement as Menéndez manages to insert her own autobiographical concerns in this playful story. Menéndez too has become English dominant in spite of her love for Spanish, her first language. The story itself is remarkable as it addresses the liminal and sometimes clumsy spaces between English and Spanish. In an interview with Amy Letter, Menéndez is asked if she thought of this particular story as a self-questioning:

> I wouldn't call it a questioning, at least not in the negative sense of the word. Perhaps an inquiry: Why did my generation of Latino writers choose to write in this particular way, about these particular themes? What would have happened if say, the American-born Calvert Casey had written his Cuban stories in a similar style –a dash of nostalgia, a sprinkling of foreign words? "Un Cuento" turns the accepted form inside out to bring its contradictions into relief. In that sense, I think you're right, it's a commentary of sorts: an acknowledgement that to write today is to produce a product, as well as a private protest against the packaging.

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How is the mother tongue silenced for heritage writers? Is identity based on language, place, or a memory passed on? Ana Menéndez's introspective stories seem to question the historical burden of all of the above. Her tales worry about language erosion and speak to the imaginative power of mental and literal thresholds and crossroads as productive spaces to negotiate issues of language amnesia. It is precisely this timeless perspective of dispersion and randomness that is central to the heritage poetics of a writer such as Menéndez. While Menéndez's poetics of appropriation and post-memory –wich i have studied elsewhere– have served as a healing influence to the characters in her fictions, my exploration of her short stories through the lens of liminality has found that the liminal situations in which Menéndez places her characters do not serve to promote their healing; rather they signal a deep authorial sorrow that cannot be erased. As a result, the silence of the native language places

the writer in a zone where inspiration cannot be translated and writing is impossible. Hopefully, the study of these short pieces has uncovered an avenue to understand Menéndez's poetics while also helping us formulate questions that are indexical of other heritage Latino writers.

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NOTES

[1] Please note the absence of page numbers when I quote from this unpublished oral presentation as well as from Menéndez's story, "Ghosts" (2016). At the time the oral presentation and the story were sent to me by the author both were still in manuscript form and had no page numbers. Since then "Ghosts" has been published in a book anthology. Please refer to my bibliography where I list said anthology with the corresponding page numbers.

[2] Today liminality has become a useful tool of analysis in multiple disciplinary fields such as conflict studies, international relations, and even psychological studies. For a complete chronology of the history of the concept

in the social sciences, see Thomassen's *Liminality and the Modern* (2014) and Viljoen's *"A Poetics of Liminality and Hybridity"* (2007).

[3] In her article, Andrea Herrera further adds her desire "to formulate a more fluid critical alternative that admits multigenerational transmissions of cultural tradition and consciousness, reflects the exchanges that arise as a result of the present-day realities of globalization and transnationalism and allows for the discrepant histories and discursive practices that collectively constitute this traveling nation that is Cuba" (184).

[4] The transmission of memories from one generation to another, a critical concept Marianne Hirsch has called "post-memory" in relation to the literature of the Holocaust has been the subject of study in other literatures under a variety of historical circumstances (Hirsch 8-9). Historian Pierre Nora and his theory of *lieux de memoire* (sites of memory) as spaces where memories can redefine relationships between past and present has also provided valuable insights to the study of the creative work of heritage artists (Nora 7-25).

[5] In Alvarez-Borland's "The Poetics of Heritage," Menéndez's poetics of appropriation and post-memory are studied in relation to her dialogue with stories by Borges and Carpentier. In "The Memories of Others," Alvarez Borland studies post-memory and appropriation in relation to photography in Menéndez's novel, *Loving Che* (2003).

[6] The reader notices that *The Poet in His Labyrinth* was authored by a fictional poet named Silas Haslam [the name of the fictional author of Borges's *Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis, Tertius*"] and that its translator Joseph Martin's name closely resembles Cuba's national patriot José Martí. But as the reader soon finds out, there is little additional playfulness in this sad story.

[7] Bjorn Thomassen's study of liminality coins the term *limivoid*" which thematizes connections between liminality and emptiness, a situation perfectly applicable to Menéndez's character in this story. See: Thomassen, *Liminality and the Modern,* 167-191.