

Traveling Queer Subjects: Homosexuality in the Cuban Diaspora

Este artículo estudia al sujeto homosexual en la diáspora cubana, sin utilizar teorías de hibridez—como lo han hecho otros académicos—pero utilizando los argumentos de José Esteban Muñoz de la “des-identificación”—una estrategia que re-constituye y luego re-implementa normas opresivas culturales. Hace una lectura minuciosa de dos cuentos con treinta años de diferencia, “Piazza Margana” de Calvert Casey (1969) y “La más prohibida de todas” de Sonia Rivera-Valdés (1997). En “Piazza Margana” Casey se des-identifica con la imagen del hombre gay penetrador cuando consigue conectarse eróticamente con su amante no a través de la penetración sexual, sino al disolverse en su sangre. En “La más prohibida de todas” Rivera-Valdés se des-identifica con la imagen de la lesbiana de-sexualizada usando lenguaje vulgar que se utiliza en el sexo heterosexual e implantándolo en escenas lésbicas. Ambos cuentos cuestionan las normas culturales y lingüísticas que regulan la homosexualidad, cambiando registros lingüísticos entre el español y el inglés, lo cual desafía cualquier noción de la pureza cultural y lingüística. Leídas juntas “Piazza Margana” y “La más prohibida de todas” nos presentan con un entendimiento de algunas de las estrategias utilizadas por los homosexuales cubanos exiliados para crear una apertura en el discurso normativo, y como estas estrategias cambian de acuerdo con el género del narrador.

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Homosexual bodies have always played a role in the telling of Cuban national history, beginning with José Martí’s treatment of male effeminacy in “Vindication of Cuba” (1889), continuing on to the Castro government’s persecution of sexual deviants in the infamous Unidades Militares para la Ayuda de Producción (UMAP) labor camps (1965–1969), and culminating in the current campaign lead by the Centro Nacional de Educación Sexual to improve the status of the homosexual in Cuba.¹ The same is true of the Cuban diaspora, which has been largely defined by the homosexual literature produced by exiled authors, such as Reinaldo Arenas.² While many scholars have traced the trajectory of the homosexual subject in Cuban and exile literature, most

have done so through theories of hybridity, which posit the subject's identity as the result of cultural mixing.³ Though we can view the homosexual Cuban subject as a fusion of cultures, much of the literature written in exile suggests that the process of identity formation is more complicated than the often-used concept of hybridity allows.

In *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*, José Esteban Muñoz argues that the homosexual subject in the diaspora is a double minority, marginalized by both sexuality and ethnicity/nationality. This means that the gay Cuban exile has a different identity formation process than the straight Cuban exile, inasmuch as he/she is perceived as doubly "other" by society, and must negotiate two "minority identifications [which] are often neglectful or antagonistic" to one another (Muñoz 8). Muñoz posits that, for "[q]ueers of color," identity is often established through a process called "disidentification," whereby the subject learns to survive in the public sphere, and even take pleasure in it, by reworking and reusing contradictory or harmful cultural norms (32). Disidentification therefore refers to a survival strategy that actively refashions dominant ideologies to form what I will term disidentificatory spaces—physical and linguistic openings in the normative discourse where the homosexual of color can reside. If hybridity looks generally at how a subject's identity is the result of cultural mixing, then disidentification looks specifically at the moments when minority subjects negotiate their identities against potentially destructive cultural norms.⁴

A re-reading of homosexual texts in the post-revolutionary diaspora through the lens of disidentification can give us insight into the ways in which their protagonists are able to inhabit the multiple spaces that oppress them.⁵ One such text, Calvert Casey's short story "Piazza Margana," describes the voyage of a protagonist penetrating his male lover's body, dissolving into his blood stream, and floating endlessly throughout it. The text was written in 1967 during Casey's self-exile to Italy, during which he feared being deported back to Cuba to face the persecution of homosexuals in the island's labor camps.⁶ "Piazza Margana" is part of a larger work that Casey destroyed before his suicide in Italy 1969. The story is generally read as a description of Casey's own romance with his Italian lover, Gianni. If we view the protagonist's performance in "Piazza Margana" as a negotiation of Casey's identities as a homosexual, an exiled Cuban, and an expatriated American, we can

argue that the story represents a reworking of the dominant cultures he inhabits and a journey to create a disidentificatory space. I will explore the ways in which Casey creates such a space within his lover's body through the use of penetration on two levels: the protagonist's physical penetration of the lover to enter a space existing outside of any political system, and Casey's linguistic penetration of the English language with Italian and Spanish phrases throughout the piece.

I will then conduct a similar reading of Sonia Rivera-Valdés's 1997 short story "La más prohibida de todas," which tells of the sexual encounters of the Cuban-born Martirio, who moved to the United States just before the 1959 revolution. The story traces the trajectory of Martirio's love life, from having frequent sex with men during her adolescence in Cuba to a passionate affair with a homosexual man in the US, marriage to an Irishman, several lesbian relationships, and finally falling in love with a Cuban woman. Because each of these encounters pushes Martirio along in her process of self-discovery, we can view her sexual history as part of her cultural and sexual identity formation. I will therefore argue that Martirio's sexual experiences represent the process of creating a disidentificatory space. Like with Casey, I will show that this sexual disidentification is paralleled by a linguistic penetration, in which her code-switching between English and several registers of Spanish embodies her negotiation of the cultures associated with these languages.

By reading these stories in conjunction, we will be able to examine how both Casey and Rivera-Valdés rework and reproduce dominant cultural norms while crossing linguistic, bodily, and national borders. Furthermore, observing differences between how each author uses disidentification will give us insight into how this process may be gendered differently for male and female homosexual subjects. Finally, such a reading will allow us to posit the creation of disidentificatory spaces as a way to conceptualize exile literature at large, which is, by definition, a body of work concerned with the issue of finding home while in a state of displacement.

Bodily Penetrations in “Piazza Margana”

Casey’s disidentification with stereotypes of homosexuality in “Piazza Margana” is provocative, nuanced, and complex. The very fact that Casey has chosen to explore a male body through the point of view of a presumably male narrator shows a willingness to face cultural taboos.⁷ As Judith Butler would argue, dominant cultural perceptions of the *other* rely on distinctions between the internal and the external: “‘Inner’ and ‘outer’ make sense only with reference to a mediating boundary . . . determined in large part by cultural orders that sanction the subject” (170). That is to say, the *other* (in this case the gay man) is viewed as a barrier between what is acceptable and what is unacceptable—a barrier that is crossed through activities such as anal sex. “[A]nal and oral sex among men,” according to Butler, “clearly establishes certain kinds of bodily permeabilities unsanctioned by the hegemonic order” (168). For Casey, an openly homosexual writer, the decision to explore the male body in his final story through penetration (that is the penetration of one man’s body by another’s) is an act of disidentification. Casey is choosing to redefine (or reappropriate) the idea of the gay man as penetrator. He is perpetuating the very stereotypes of homosexuality to new ends.

We might draw here upon Julia Kristeva’s notion of the abject—that is, an object that is both inside and outside of us, that both summons and repels. Using the example of feces, Kristeva states, “I expel *myself*; I spit *myself* out, I abject *myself* within the same motion through which ‘I’ claim to establish *myself*” (3). The abject, though repulsive, cannot be completely separated from the self, thereby blending the borderline of subject and object. Casey’s protagonist has entered a body, which, on a physiological level, he is in danger of being expelled from. Yet it is through this entrance that his new self, the one that has found eternal peace, is constituted. Faced with images that are at once nauseating and sexually enticing the protagonist is caught in “a vortex of summons and repulsion” (Kristeva 1). Stating “I wondered what the smell and taste of it could all be . . . to lick the bones, to chew the soft, tender flesh, lay the scrotum open, deplete the bladder,” the narrator revels in disidentificatory possibilities of abjection (Casey 187). The border crossing that the abject allows—between subject and object, internal and external—make it so that Casey is able to reconsider and

disidentify with dominant perceptions of the gay male penetrator. Whereas the gay male gaze is constructed by the dominant culture in a stereotypical way, Casey's construction of this gaze is intended to deny identity and become self-affirming (Muñoz 72).

To prove Casey's disidentificatory strategy we must look at the ways in which he reworks some or all of the cultures with which he is dealing. Gustavo Pérez-Firmat suggests in "Bilingual Blues, Bilingual Bliss" that Casey finds refuge from the Cuba that has abandoned him in his English prose. He points specifically to the quote, "I have attained what no political or social system could ever dream of attaining: I am free, utterly free inside you, forever free from all fears and cares. No exit permit, no entry permit, no passport, no borders, no visa, no *carta d'identità*, no nothing!" (Casey 188–89). I agree with Pérez-Firmat's contention that this statement is a direct refusal of the Cuban political system, and perhaps political systems in general. This disidentification is a complex one in which Casey is refashioning the concept of a home in a geographic sense with the concept of a home in his lover's body. This is in direct contrast to another strategy seen in some of Casey's works, such as "Homecoming," in which the protagonist replaces one home nation with another—resulting in alienation and death.

Casey's strategy in "Piazza Margana" is different as he disidentifies by creating a new home that clings to certain stereotypes, while rejecting others. We can see this rejection of stereotypes in the fact that, for Casey's protagonist, this territory is completely uncharted. He expresses this when he writes that his experience "has no precedent in history and will go down in the annals of mankind" (188). For the protagonist, the feat of having escaped the human existence is liberating. At the same time, Casey's protagonist is not able to remove himself completely from his prior incarnation as a homosexual male. This is evidenced in the prior quote through the use of the word "annals," likely a reference to the word anal in Spanish or anus in English.

Throughout the text we consistently see references to the stereotypes generally attached to homosexuality. For instance, the narrator's prolonged interest in genitals and rectums is significant. The text reads, "diet for weeks on the genital cord; ever more earnest, ever more eager, feed, feed slowly on the eardrums, the eyes, the tongue, gnaw at the rectal opening" (188). Casey consistently returns to the images of genitals and rectums, despite the fact that the journey is of course throughout the entire body. He writes:

I know that I will be with you, travel with you, sleep with you, dream with you, urinate and generally defecate with you, make love *with and through* you, hate with you, think, cry, grow senile, warm, cold and warm again, feel, look, jerk off, kiss, kill, pet, fart, fade, flush, turn into ashes, lie, humiliate myself and others, strip, stab, wilt, wait, wail, laugh, steal, quiver, waver, ejaculate, linger, backscuttle, pray, fall, doublecross, triplecross, ogle, browse, goose, suck, brag, bleed, blow with and through you. (188)

A careful dissection of this quote may lead us to a further understanding of Casey's disidentification with homosexuality within the text. Of the 47 clauses in this sentence, about half have a relation to sex, genitals or the rectum. Of these clauses, several have blatantly sexual connotations, namely: "jerk off," "quiver, waver, ejaculate, linger, backscuttle," "suck," "bleed," "blow with and through you." These clauses reinforce the cultural view of gay men as a sex-obsessed being. The use of the slang terms "backscuttle," "jerk off," and "blow" suggest a further level of engagement with popular culture. Not only is Casey choosing to stick to these common gay stereotypes, he is also choosing to do so in a rudimentary way.

On the other hand, some of Casey's references to the lover's genitalia have no relation to sex at all. The use of the terms "urinate and generally defecate with you," "fart," and "flush" suggest that there is nothing stereotypically gay at all about this relationship. Rather the protagonist's relation to his lover is commonplace, everyday. It is no more gay than any of the other non-sexual clauses would suggest: "dream with you," "grow senile," "humiliate myself and others." Casey's interspersing of stereotypically gay clauses with commonplace clauses further proves that he is neither reproducing the gay stereotype, nor is he completely rejecting it.

Casey creates a text that, as Muñoz argues, goes beyond creating a "sanitized and desexualized queer subject" to create one that "stirs up uncertain desire-zones" (99). The author's careful interweaving of sexual imagery with commonplace occurrences completely transforms what the reader might expect from a gay text. That is, it posits the gay person as both hyper-sexualized and human at the same time. Although the narrator seems overly concerned with his lover's genitals and rectum, the reader is still left to question the reason for this concern. It no longer becomes a question of stereotypical gay desire, but rather a more complex portrayal of gay life. As the narrator says, it is "[n]ot only the soft hair on your pubis but also your heart" (191).

Casey comments on his own willingness to “stir up desires” in his 1956 article “Nota sobre pornografía,” in which he explores D.H. Lawrence’s campaign against pornography. He argues, in contrast to Lawrence’s viewpoint, that “[a] pornographic film can be a catalyzing agent of great value” (Casey, “Note . . .” 108). By seeing the potential of pornography to incite critical reflection, Casey is perhaps prefacing his eventual performance in “Piazza Margana.” As Casey argues in the article, a purely sexual text can be freeing to the reader. He writes: “The pure pornographic experience, stripped of its makeup and of all limitations imposed directly or indirectly by the prejudices, can be supremely beautiful and can lead to serenity or to exaltation” (109). This “serenity” and “exaltation” is precisely what both the protagonist and the reader experience as a result of the story’s unabashed sexuality. By writing penetration in an overtly sexual and homosexual way, Casey creates in his short story exactly the type of liberation that he called for in his 1956 article.

At the same time, by juxtaposing this overt sexuality with a more subtle form of penetration, one that focuses on the humanity of the homosexual subject, Casey is able to complicate his portrayal. He does this, in part, through the way he frames the story. Casey begins the first paragraph with a description of his lover’s bodily functions—“I have gone beyond the urine, beyond excrement and its sweet, acrid taste, and have at last lost myself in the warm recesses of your body” (187). Right away the reader understands the protagonist’s lover in biological terms—he, like all humans, produces urine and excrement. In contrast to this description, Casey ends the story with a paragraph describing the lover in sexual terms—“I could now take a respite before it is too late and make the long voyage down to the tip of your cock, with a brief stopover inside the testicles” (192–93). The reader is now pushed to see the lover as the protagonist sees him, as a sexual object. Casey’s nuanced depiction of penetration—it is both mundane and provocative—shows his willingness to disidentify with homosexual stereotypes to more fully depict gay life.

Bodily Penetrations in “La más prohibida de todas”

Like “Piazza Margana,” “La más prohibida de todas” is a text marked by the permeation of boundaries through sex. The two texts differ, however, with respect to how this penetration is gendered. Although we can maintain, as Butler does, that any type of bodily penetration represents a transgression, we must also acknowledge that this transgression holds different connotations in lesbian versus gay male sex. With Casey’s protagonist, we view penetration as a rebellion against the cultural trope of the gay man as penetrator/perpetrator of anal sex. Lesbians, however, are not culturally construed as penetrators, perhaps because lesbian sex is not conceived in terms of anal penetration. It follows, then, that in Rivera-Valdés’s text Martirio’s penetration rebels against a different stereotype than Casey’s: that of lesbians/women as less sexually active than men. By initiating physical and linguistic penetration with various sexual partners, Martirio is disidentifying with this de-sexualized lesbian stereotype to produce a homosexual female subject that is both the penetrator and perpetrator of sex.

Martirio’s sexual experiences are revealed to us throughout the story in the form of an interview between her and Marta Veneranda, the researcher for whom the book is named, whose job it is to compile testimonials about secrets for her dissertation. Early in the story Martirio shares with Marta the details of her youthful exploits with older, married men in Cuba—encounters characterized not just by physical penetration, but also by the verbal penetration that accompanies it. As Martirio describes it, “Eran sesiones de sexo con acompañamiento vocal ininterrumpido” (*Las historias prohibidas* . . . 111). Martirio describes the dialogue of one such session. It begins with a verbal declaration of the penetration: “Ábrete, mami, enséñale a tu papi todo lo que tu tienes guardadito entre las piernas y que tú sabes es mío aunque te resistas” (114). The woman, playing her role, begs her partner to penetrate her, to which he responds with insertion: “él, suavcito, iba poniendo los dedos dentro de mí al ritmo de las palabras” (114). Although Martirio participates in and enjoys these encounters, she states that she never felt comfortable, and therefore never played her part verbally. “Y yo miraba hacia todos los espacios posibles del cuarto menos para donde suponían las reglas del juego que lo hiciera” (112). By refusing to participate in the verbal aspect of penetration, Martirio is refusing to identify with normative Cuban heterosexuality and, by extension, Cuban culture.

In her later sexual encounters, Martirio experiences penetration through another cultural lens. Though she enjoys her heterosexual encounters in the United States, she longs for the verbal component of Cuban heterosexual sex. She attains this combination for the first time in the US when she sleeps with Shrinivas, her Indian modeling partner. She describes sex with Shrinivas as “la primera vez que hice el amor, la primera vez que me lo hicieron” (119). Although Shrinivas does not speak during sex like her previous Cuban partners, they open up to one another after sex—telling each other the darkest secrets of their upbringings. Martirio says of the experience “no puse condiciones a la entrada de su cuerpo en el mío, ni de su alma en la mía” (122). This penetration of each other’s bodies and souls marks the first time Martirio is completely comfortable within a sexual encounter. This experience with Shrinivas begins to create the type of disidentificatory space that Martirio seeks. Although the sex is heterosexual, it begins to transform some of the sexual norms that Martirio rebels against—namely the idea that sex has to be an exercise in domination. Nonetheless, the space dissipates when the experience ends abruptly, with Shrinivas informing Martirio that he must go back to his lover—a man.

At this, a turning point in the text, Martirio becomes aware of her desire to fuse the physical and verbal penetration of her teenage years with the emotional connection she experienced with Shrinivas—her need to create a comfortable sexual space. What follows are several failed relationships, including the marriage to Mark, and several female lovers—all of which are missing some component of the space she seeks to create.

One such example, her relationship with Ada, shows that breaking with cultural norms is more difficult than she thinks. Martirio, having made the decision to begin sleeping with women, thinks that they will be able to offer her both the physical and verbal penetration that she desires. With Ada, however, she learns that “no todas las mujeres son capaces de la intimidación de palabra y obra de que yo las suponía dotadas en su totalidad” (130). Though Martirio and Ada have homosexual sex, Ada’s sexual behavior adheres to heterosexual stereotypes. Martirio complains about Ada’s refusal to take an active role in sex when she says, “El amor era un acto de diversión aguada por ella misma, en el cual más que hacer esperaba que le hicieran, y del que salía alienada y confusa” (129). Martirio stays with Ada for six years, despite the fact that her

inability to take an active role in sex is reminiscent of Martirio's own passive relationships with men in Cuba.

Ultimately, Martirio does not find a sexual space that she is comfortable in until she sleeps with Rocío, the Cuban woman who she meets while the latter is on a trip to New York. With Rocío, Martirio is finally able to create a sexual space that combines the positive aspects of her past sexual experiences. She states, “[l]e ofrecí desde el primer abrazo lo mejor, las palabras del dueño de la finca de Camagüey, las posiciones de Shrivanas, la pasión de Betina” (145). She maintains the sexual practices that represent each of her cultures: the verbal cues she learned from her lover from Camaguey, which represents her Cuban past; the sexual positions she learned from Shrivanas, which represents her experience in American immigrant culture; the passion she learned from her latest lover Betina, which represents her inclusion into American lesbian culture. Martirio takes each of these, and refashions them into a sexual experience that is not representative of any of these cultures. She disidentifies with each culture—meaning that she reworks their cultural norms—in order to create a space where she, as a subject constantly oscillating between them, can finally feel at home.

We can see an example of this disidentification when Martirio whispers to Rocío, “Ábrete, rica, enséñale a tu mami todo lo que tienes guardadito entre las piernas y que tú sabes es mió aunque te resistas” (145). In this interaction we see Martirio using the language of her past Cuban lovers, but adapting it by substituting the word “mami” for “papi.” Through her use of the linguistic games characteristic of heterosexual Cuban sex in a homosexual situation, Martirio disidentifies with the Cuban heterosexual culture. The scene takes another unexpected turn, however, when Rocío responds, “estoy como tú me querías, para ti solita, para que me goces. Ahora tú me vas a dar a mí lo mismo” (145). In this excerpt Rocío reverses the roles of the dialogue by eliminating the presence of domination. She goes along with the role-play at first, but in stating “tú me vas a dar a mí lo mismo” she establishes an equality between the two women. Rather than playing the passive role and allowing Martirio to play the active role—thereby reproducing the power games of the heterosexual sex of Martirio's youth—Rocío changes the rules of the game by playing the active role as well. Rocío goes on to create this egalitarian space when she states “fíjate lo buena que soy yo contigo, vas a ser tú igual conmigo” (145). Here Rocío

clearly states that the domination usually present in this role-playing has been replaced by equality between both women.

Having arrived at this space, Martirio states that she experiences, “el diálogo perfecto que yo había vislumbrado hacía cuarenta años pero del cual no había tenido certeza hasta hoy” (145). This scene allows Martirio to experience the safe space that she had imagined, but never been able to attain through her sexual encounters. It therefore shows the culmination of Martirio’s search for a disidentificatory space. The space that the two women create is more than just sexual; it is a cultural space where Martirio can work on and against the dominant ideologies of the cultures she inhabits.

Linguistic Penetrations in “Piazza Margana”

Both “Piazza Margana” and “La más prohibida de todas” present us with a complex view of disidentification that relies as much on physical penetration as it does on linguistic penetration. In his essay, “La política queer del espanglish,” Lawrence La Fountain-Stokes speaks to the similarities of sexual and linguistic transgression, determining that both Spanglish (a mixture of English and Spanish occurring among Latino immigrants in the United States) and homosexuality result in a *queering* of the dominant culture—meaning that both present a challenge to normative concepts of linguistic and sexual purity (143). In the case of “Piazza Margana” we can view the protagonist’s sexual and linguistic penetrations in much the same way, as a negotiation of cultural norms.

Written almost entirely in English, “Piazza Margana” is one of Casey’s only two non-Spanish language works. Many critics have taken Casey’s use of English as a rejection of the Cuban culture that forced him into exile, and its language. In “Bilingual Blues, Bilingual Bliss” Gustavo Pérez-Firmat posits that Casey’s use of English in his final story is a conscious choice to rebel against the nation from which he is in exile, Cuba, and the culture that prohibits his homosexuality, Cuban culture. Others have seen his linguistic choice as less important, arguing, as Guillermo Cabrera Infante does, “his Spanish is English by other means and both are nothing more than an end to Calvert Casey” (120). In contrast to both views, I see Casey’s use of language in the story not

as a rejection of one identity, or as an inconsequential detail, but rather as an attempt to negotiate all of his identities through a penetration of one language by the other. Though the story is written in English, Casey interjects Spanish and Italian phrases to assist his journey through the body. Inasmuch as these languages are representative of the cultures from which they originate, Casey's final piece is a reworking of the cultures he inhabits in order to create a disidentificatory space.

The first example comes when the narrator states of his lover "Envejeceremos juntos, dijiste," and we will" (Casey 187). We can note that the word "dijiste" is also within quotation marks, insinuating that the entire phrase "envejeceremos juntos, dijiste" is being reflected upon. This suggests two possibilities. First, it can suggest that someone uttered the entire statement "Envejeceremos juntos, dijiste"—presumably the lover in whose body the narrator is swimming. If this is the case, it suggests that the narrator is reliving his *own* promise to his lover—his own statement "envejeceremos juntos." Alternately, it can suggest that the narrator uttered to the lover "envejeceremos juntos, dijiste." If this is the case, then the narrator is reliving his *lover's* promise to grow old together. Either way, this quote is significant in that it suggests there has been some Spanish dialogue during at least two points prior to the story. It is not necessarily, as one might first assume, that the narrator thinks in Spanish as he tells the tale.

Pérez-Firmat has argued that for Casey "Spanish is the language of family, of history, of the *sosiego* of social life and the *bienestar* of companionship" ("Bilingual" 446). In opposition to Pérez-Firmat's reading, I would argue that it is not entirely clear whether Spanish represents "the *bienestar* of companionship" in this instance. We cannot be sure whether it was chosen by Casey to display his own emotional diglossia—his need to express love in Spanish—or whether it was chosen because, on a very basic level, the statement was actually originally uttered in Spanish. To view Casey's use of language in terms of emotional diglossia would imply a clear-cut dualism in not only his writing, but also in his cultural identification. Rather, I suggest Casey's choice to use Spanish or English is a deliberate reworking of precisely these cultural stereotypes.

At another point in "Piazza Margana," Casey returns to Spanish in his description of the lover's body using Latin and Spanish medical terms—a phenomenon Pérez-Firmat refers to as "latent and blatant

multilingualism” (“Bilingual” 443). On this point, I agree with Pérez-Firmat’s analysis. Casey’s use of languages other than English suggests a “blatant” disidentification not just with Cuban culture, but rather with all of his cultures. Casey chooses to use each language when it suits him—unabashedly switching back and forth between the three. In this way Casey is not entirely approaching the text through English. He effectively uses both Spanish and Italian—“latent” and inactive as they may be throughout the rest of the story—to explore the inner depths of his lover’s body. The mixture of all three languages shows that Casey is not simply identifying or counteridentifying with any *one* language.

This point is later exemplified when Casey launches into an Italian monologue:

“Sono il tuo sangue! Quello che senti rimbazzarti dentro, questi brividi, questa strana gioia, questa paura, questa bramosia, sono io, sono io, galleggiana nelle tue arterie, è la carne che rammenta, dorennavanti rammentiamo insieme per l’eternità, amore, amore, pauroso amore mio!”
 [I am your blood! What you feel bounding within you, these shudders, this strange joy, this fear, this desire, is I, is I, floating within your arteries, is the flesh that remembers, as from now on we shall remember together, my timorous love!] (Casey 191)

Casey’s sudden eruption into Italian suggests that English—as he himself said of Spanish—“en este caso . . . no me servía” (“Bilingual” 439). In other words, it suggests that at the end of this sterile and medicalized portion of his trip throughout the body, he must burst out in another language to express his emotion. Because we see that this quote is not unlike some of his English exclamations—namely “Your heart! At last I am your heart!” (Casey 191)—it becomes clear that Casey’s interspersing of various languages represents a blending of cultures, and the creation of a space in which he uses one language to disidentify with another.

Linguistic Penetrations in “La más prohibida de todas”

Like Casey, Rivera-Valdés relies on several linguistic shifts throughout Martirio’s story. Although “La más prohibida de todas” is written in standard Spanish, Martirio interrupts her narrative with English and other registers of Spanish—a move that points to the

complexities of her identity formation process. We can observe three types of linguistic switches in “La más prohibida de todas”: English interjections performed with the purpose of portraying an American phenomenon, English interjections with the purpose of expressing emotion, and interjections of the Spanish of Martirio’s youth into the Spanish of her present.

The first type of interjection is the most common throughout the text. While telling her story, Martirio often code switches into English to express terms that she has learned since coming to the United States. The earliest of these examples is her use of the word “weekend” (*Las historias prohibidas . . .* 119). Martirio chooses to say of Shrivana, “afirmó que aquel *weekend* no tendría responsabilidades familiares”—selecting the popular term “weekend” rather than Spanish “fin de semana.” Martirio’s use of the English term demonstrates her acceptance of American immigrant culture, as she assumes her interviewer Marta Veneranda, also a Cuban immigrant, will understand it. Martirio performs several other similar linguistic switches, including her use of the terms “los panties” (129), her description of a card she keeps on her refrigerator “cerrada con scotch tape para que nadie la lea” (132), and her description of the effects of “global warming” (142). The latter two linguistic switches are inserted into the text without italics, perhaps suggesting that Martirio herself does not notice the use of these English words in her Spanish speech. The same is true when Martirio states that she is “terminando el Master,” which is an incorporation of the American *masters* degree, pronounced as though it were a Spanish word (130). What these seemingly unintentional code switches show us are the ways in which both of Martirio’s cultures influence her speech. Martirio’s assumption that Marta will understand her references to these English or modified-English terms, also suggests that she shares a common immigrant culture with her.

Martirio’s code switching leads us to believe that American culture has penetrated both her language and her identity. This is evidenced by the fact that throughout the story she switches into English to express several emotional concepts. The first mention occurs when she is listing the jobs that she had immediately after coming to the US: “escritora, camarera en cafeterías, cajera en supermercados, vendedora de hamburgers en McDonalds, *just name it*” (118). Martirio attempts to use the popular American saying “you name it”—here botched and

repeated instead as “just name it”—to explain her long list of jobs. We are lead to assume here that either such a saying does not exist in Cuban Spanish, or that the very concept of “just name it” is an American concept better expressed in English. Either way, it seems that although Martirio’s monologue is taking place in Spanish, the concept of working several low-end jobs as a newly arrived immigrant to New York belongs to her English vocabulary, as it is an American phenomenon.

Martirio uses another loaded English term to express her relationship with Shrinivas, her Indian modeling partner. After spending a passionate and emotionally intense weekend with Shrinivas, and feeling completely betrayed after learning he has a boyfriend, Martirio describes her experience by saying: “Salí de aquel *affair* con un ansia de intimidación y un intensidad en la palabra que asustaba” (124). Martirio’s choice of the word “*affair*” here implies the negative connotations that Americans associate with the term.⁸

The most telling example of the use of English in this story occurs during Martirio’s trip to Cuba. Martirio arrives in Cuba and, though she has been back to Cuba several times since leaving when she was eighteen years old, she expresses the awe that she feels upon each return. She states, “Miro el cielo, qué increíble me parece, cielo cubano, y oigo los gorriones, my God, gorriones cubanos y toda la yerba que uno ve es yerba cubana” (143). In this, one of the most emotional scenes of the story, Martirio chooses to describe her awe of the Cuban landscape using an English term, “my God.” Although the term “my God” exists in Spanish, Martirio chooses to switch into English to express her excitement. Here we see perhaps the clearest example of the ways in which Martirio’s American culture penetrates her Cuban culture. For Martirio, even the most Cuban experience cannot be separated from her American emotional vocabulary.

The last type of code switching that I want to analyze takes place within the same language—that is, there are two times throughout the story when Martirio uses a Spanish vocabulary representative of her youth. Although Martirio is already speaking in Spanish, her use of a youthful vocabulary suggests a type of code switching in that it represents a world and culture that is now distanced from her. By analyzing the ways in which Martirio slips into another Spanish register, we can further see how her experience as a disidentified subject is constructed.

The first example occurs during Martirio's first meeting with Rocío. After meeting Rocío in a bookstore, Martirio falls in love and spends the afternoon sharing personal stories with her at a café. When it is time to go, it becomes obvious that Rocío wants to spend the night with Martirio, who avoids the subject by stating their age difference "[yo tengo] exactamente treinta más que tú. Pudieras ser mi hija, *descansadamente*,— respondí acudiendo a un adverbio que no usaba hacía, tal vez, los mismos años que le llevaba" (141).

Martirio notes that the last time she used this adverb she was Rocío's age. For her, the presence of a fellow Cuban has prompted her back into a vocabulary that she used in the time period shortly after her arrival from Cuba. At this moment, two of Martirio's worlds—that of a recently arrived immigrant and that of a Cuban New Yorker—penetrate one another. This moment is so significant for Martirio that she remembers the exact adverb that she used, and relates the story back verbatim to Marta Veneranda. This moment represents a crucial one in the text, in that it takes us back to a time period where Martirio is neither completely Cuban, nor completely American. At the moment when Martirio uses the word "*descansadamente*" she is transported to a time when her identities had just begun to split.

A convergence of identities takes place when Martirio returns to Cuba and visits Rocío. Upon entering Rocío's room, she states with a certain nostalgia: "en este cuarto había una ventana frente al mar y por ella entraba un chorro de luz que nunca hubo en los de hacía cuarenta años y mi corazón estaba colmado y mi lengua llena de palabras que había perdido el miedo a pronunciar" (144). This moment of return to Cuba prompts in Martirio a convergence of the identities that she has known throughout her lifetime. She is taken back to a time before she left Cuba—a time that was filled with turmoil as much as it was with pleasure. Nonetheless, upon returning Martirio is filled with hope, and her tongue seems to remember words that she has been afraid to pronounce since going into exile. Martirio is able to revert back to a different Spanish at this moment—a Spanish that pre-exists the entrance of the American and American immigrant cultures into her life.

It might be interesting to note here that for Martirio code-switching seems to come more naturally than it does for Casey's protagonist. Whereas Martirio shifts back and forth between different languages and registers throughout the entire story, Casey uses Spanish and

Italian only a handful of times. Furthermore, Martirio's code-switching is so effortless that it often occurs within the same sentence. This is not the case for Casey, whose code-switching is usually separated into different sentences. The ease with which Martirio moves from one language to another suggests a permeability that is not present in Casey's piece. This can be related, once again, to the way that penetration is gendered. Casey's text demonstrates the penetration of one body by another. His use of language takes on a similar dimension, with only one language penetrating the narrative at a time. Rivera-Valdés, on the other hand, describes the mutual penetration of lesbian relationships. Likewise, in her text there is a sense of fluidity, as languages consistently penetrate one another. Luce Irigaray articulates a similar notion of language and sexuality in her description of the masculine and feminine logic. According to Irigaray, whereas male pleasure and language is singular, female pleasure and language comes from "at least two (lips) which keeps woman in touch with herself, but without any possibility of distinguishing what is touching from what it touched" (26).⁹ This view of woman as multiple, as constantly in touch with herself, is reflected in the way Martirio's languages rub up against one another. Where Casey seems to disidentify with one language at a time, Martirio allows her languages to flow into each other. In this way we can see how Martirio's disidentification with languages reflects the fluid space where her identities intersect.

Creating a Disidentificatory Space

"Piazza Margana" and "La más prohibida de todas" are two texts in which the protagonists rework normative ideas of sex, sexuality, and penetration to transgress boundaries, cross cultures, and build new spaces to reside for the homosexual Cuban exile. Where Casey's protagonist combines penetration with the concept of a linguistic home, Martirio mixes her sexual past with the languages she has inhabited. Where Casey's protagonist finds his comfort in the endless traversing of his lover's body, Martirio finds comfort in her sexual space with Rocío. Where Casey's protagonist ends his narrative by asserting "I am NOT leaving" (193), Martirio declares her continued happiness at the end of her story by stating, "[y] en eso estamos" (*Las historias prohibidas* . . . 145).

In some sense, however, just as these texts show the creation of a successful disidentificatory space, so too do they display the dissipation of such a space. One must be conscious of the fact that although both protagonists assert the permanence of their situations, neither Casey nor Rivera-Valdés is truly able to create a lasting state of peacefulness. Rather the disidentification that both characters engage in is a continuous process of creation and destruction.¹⁰

For Casey's protagonist, the possibilities of disidentification seem to be endless. At the end of the story, the protagonist claims, "I have entered the Kingdom of Heaven and taken proud possession of it. This is my private claim, my heritage, my fief. I am NOT leaving" (194). Of course, one cannot help but wonder whether this statement is more a wish than a fact. Although the protagonist does claim to write the tale while "traveling at ease in unspeakable merriment through your bloodstream," the story itself begins as a fantasy (188). According to the protagonist, his travels began with "a terrible urge to have a taste of it [blood]" (187). He then goes on to describe how he "thought of the red raw tissues of the stomach . . . saw the inlets of your mouth . . . wondered what the smell and taste of it all could be" (187). At some point, however, the narrator goes from thinking, seeing, and wondering—as the prior quotes suggest—to actually inhabiting his lover's insides. This transition is not explained in the text, leaving the reader to wonder whether the voyage actually occurs, or whether it is a fantasy. In this way the disidentificatory space created by Casey is, actually, only partially successful. On the one hand, the story envisions a private, disidentificatory space far from the confines of the public life mandated by each of the protagonist's cultures. It is a location from which the narrator can safely say, "I am NOT leaving" and boldly declare "Who could stop me except death and then it would be *our* death" (193).¹¹ On the other hand, the reader is left wondering whether the protagonist has indeed crafted this space he boasts about, or whether the space must necessarily dissipate once his fantasy ends. The latter reading suggests not the impossibility of the disidentificatory space, but rather the impossibility of its permanence.¹²

In Martirio's case her disidentificatory space is undone when she must return to the United States, as evidenced by the fact that her interview with Marta Veneranda takes place in New York. We can understand this through the context of the story's last line: "y en eso estamos." Unlike Debra A. Castillo, who argues that the story is "a happy

return to the motherland instantiated fully,” or Yolanda Martínez-San Miguel who argues that Martirio’s journey is “mediado por el deseo de recuperar la patria perdida,” I would argue that no permanent reconnection with Cuba occurs (141, 359). This reading is substantiated in “La semilla más honda del limón,” a follow up story written by Rivera-Valdés in her second book, *Historias de mujeres grandes y chiquitas*. This story is meant to be a retelling of “La más prohibida de todas” written by Martirio herself. In this version of the story, Martirio confirms that her relationship with Rocío does in fact continue, long distance, after her interview with Marta. The love affair ends, however, during a visit to Cuba in which Martirio discovers that Rocío has not been faithful to her. Upon admitting this fact, Rocío bombards Martirio with a list of reasons that the two have never been compatible—namely, Martirio’s distance from Cuban culture. Rocío proclaims, “Me hubiera gustado secuestrarte y amarrarte y obligarte a comer lo que yo comía, a fumar, prohibirte el brócoli y el tofu y hacerte olvidar el yoga” (181). This desire to reintroduce Martirio into Cuban culture and make her forget about her American culture—as it is represented in broccoli, tofu and yoga—will ultimately be the force that drives Martirio and Rocío apart. Martirio is, in fact, unable to have “a happy return to the motherland instantiated fully,” as Castillo suggests, because the fluidity of her experience in exile means that she must inhabit multiple spaces at once. When Rocío states that she would have liked to “secuestrarte y amarrarte,” she is demanding a rigidity that Martirio, as an exile subject creating disidentificatory spaces, cannot provide her. For this reason I offer a second reading in which the verb “estamos” refers to Martirio’s collective self. In this case the final sentence of the story, “y en eso estamos” (*Las historias prohibidas* . . . 145), alludes to the fact that she, as an amalgamation of all of her cultures, is “still at it”—still at the process of creating disidentificatory spaces as a survival strategy. For Martirio, survival in the public sphere is predicated upon a constant renegotiation of these identities through a continuous cycle of the construction and destruction of disidentificatory spaces

We arrive here at an important point, which is that although disidentification is a viable survival strategy for these subjects, it is not a utopia.¹³ The main distinction between a utopia and a disidentificatory space, in my view, is that the latter implies a problematization of dominant cultural norms. It is a method of constructing and reconstructing

safe spaces while crossing linguistic, cultural, and national boundaries. Disidentification is therefore about both fluidity and agency. We can see this in the example of Casey's protagonist, who is in a constant state of motion. He does not inhabit any tangible identity, but rather distances himself from rigid definitions. He states, "My freedom of choice and sojourn knows no limit. I have attained what no political or social system could ever dream of attaining" (Casey 188). Rather than reconstruct a new stable identity within this body, the protagonist revels in his decision to be fluid in the situation. He continues traveling throughout the entire piece, never resting for long in any one place or any one definition of the self.

The same can be said for Martirio's movement between Cuba and New York. The character is aware that she is never fully a part of Cuban culture, American immigrant culture or lesbian culture. She flows in and out of all of these, depending on the situation. In this sense, "La más prohibida de todas" is a kind of "nomadic literature" which does not lend itself to stable definitions of identity, but rather works from various positions of subjectivity (Brooks 13). Martirio herself moves in and out of subject positions while always maintaining a sense of play. It is rigidity—as seen in the form of the Cuban lover that refused to play along with the verbal sex talk, instead strictly matching his words to his actions—that she tries to escape through her disidentification with various cultural norms.

By comparing the two stories we can further see ways in which this disidentification is gendered. In many ways, Casey's protagonist is less flexible than Rivera-Valdés's. Whereas Casey constructs penetration in one direction—with one lover penetrating the other—Rivera-Valdés depicts a multi-directional penetration. For example, Casey's protagonist is not able to slip in and out of his lover's body in order to engage in this process of destroying and recreating disidentificatory spaces. Rather, he enters his lover's body and proudly proclaims "I am NOT leaving" (193). In this way Casey desires a stability that contrasts with Rivera-Valdés fluidity. Rather than penetrating one body with another, Rivera-Valdés allows for a more open reading in which several bodies penetrate one another, and several disidentificatory spaces can be created or destroyed.

This reading suggests that it is necessary to further deconstruct disidentification in order to expose how it may be gendered—a move

that Muñoz does not make in *Disidentifications*. In this way it may be possible to argue that just as the gay Cuban exile has a different identity formation process than the straight Cuban exile, so too might the lesbian Cuban exile have a different identity formation process than the gay male Cuban exile.

Reading both texts through the lens of disidentification allows us to see the identity construction process not in terms of absolutes, but rather in terms of movement—a useful distinction when studying exile literature, which by definition is always displaced. This reading is necessary, I argue, in order to avoid relegating minority subjects to fixed and potentially oppressive identities—both in exile literature and in the larger homosexual community. Despite the thirty years that separate the writing of “Piazza Margana” and “La más prohibida de todas,” both stories display a desire to blur boundaries that is often present in homosexual texts. Although the former was written at a time when homosexuals were being systematically persecuted in Cuba, and the latter was written during a decade when homosexual texts and films experienced a boom on the island, both stories seem to rise above these differences to get to the heart of the human experience—one that does not focus on political realities, but rather on creating a solution for the oppression and challenges faced by Cuban homosexuals in exile.¹⁴

If, as Victor Fowler claims, Casey’s oeuvre was characterized by a “fascination with the reverse of history, taking reverse to mean bringing to light the dark and the dirty,” then we can read “Piazza Margana” as one of the only texts in which Casey looks forward (187). It is a text that opens up a path “to the beyond of death” (Fowler 199). Likewise, we can read “La más prohibida de todas” as a piece that looks beyond the difficulties of the immigrant experience as presented in the other stories of *Las historias prohibidas de Marta Veneranda*, toward a brighter future. As such, these stories lend themselves to a reading that shows how homosexual exile subjects, and exile subjects in general, can flow in and out of multiple spaces of oppression by disidentifying with dominant cultural norms.

NOTES

¹ For an in-depth analysis of José Martí's writings on masculinity and sexuality, see chapter one in Emilio Bejel's *Gay Cuban Nation*. For a description of the Unidades Militares de Ayuda a la Producción (UMAP) see José B. Alvarez IV's "The Dialectics of Homoeroticism in Cuban Narrative." To research the current Cuban government's stance on homosexuality, see the webpage for the Centro Nacional de Educación Sexual (CENESEX).

² I use the term diaspora in the same sense that Ambrosio Fornet uses it in his essay "The Cuban Literary Diaspora and Its Contexts: A Glossary." It is meant to refer to the dispersion of Cubans on and off the island, without the charged connotations of the terms "exile" and "emigrant." At the same time, however, I must acknowledge that the literature written in the diaspora is, in large part, literature written in political exile. This is a theme that Gustavo Pérez-Firmat comments on in his recent article "The Spell of the Hyphen," which posits that Cuban-American literature differs from other Latino literatures precisely because it has been written by political exiles and their children. I choose to use both the terms diaspora and exile in this piece, with the understanding that the Cuban diaspora has been largely composed of political exiles, even if not entirely.

³ Most of these theories of hybridity, such as those espoused by Ángel Rama and Antonio Benítez-Rojo, have as their basis Fernando Ortiz's concept of transculturation. In the early twentieth century Ortiz astutely proclaimed that Cuban culture is "un concepto vital de fluencia constante" rather than "una realidad sintética ya formada y conocida" (Pérez-Firmat "Cuban Condition" 22). This understanding of culture as fragmented is useful, yet it does not sufficiently take into account how the subject himself is actively involved in the process of enacting identity. It also does not account for the specific moments when the subject refashions harmful cultural norms as part of this performance of identity.

⁴ In *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*, Muñoz comments that the term "hybridity" in his study "is meant to have an indexical use in that it captures, collects, and brings into play various theories of fragmentation in relation to minority identity practices" (31). As such Muñoz does not throw out the concept of hybridity altogether, but rather uses it as a generalized term for a variety of theories of identity fragmentation, of which disidentification is one.

⁵ I choose to use the term homosexual because of its insistence on the "sexual" aspect of queerness—that is that the sex act is a definitive part of a homosexual identity. By defining these texts as homosexual, I am therefore highlighting the importance of sexuality to any reading of them. Although I focus specifically on male and female homosexuality, many of my conclusions may be applicable to the larger queer continuum, of which homosexuality forms only a part.

⁶ For more information on the Unidades Militares para la Ayuda de Producción (UMAP) labor camps and on Casey's own reactions to the persecution of homosexuals in Cuba, see the chapter on Casey in Guillermo Cabrera Infante's *Mea Cuba*.

⁷ Although the gender of the narrator is never explicitly stated, it is generally acknowledged that Casey wrote the piece in response to an incident that occurred between him and his real life lover, Gianni. Casey also acknowledges the homosexual theme of the piece in a letter to Guillermo Cabrera Infante. For more information see Pérez-Firmat's "Bilingual Blues, Bilingual Bliss: El Caso Casey."

⁸ If we are to take the book's earlier story "Cinco ventanas del mismo lado" as a guide, we can assume that the concept of an affair is different to the Cuban subject than to the American subject. "Cinco ventanas del mismo lado" tells the story of two married women who have a relationship. Laura lives in Cuba, and Mayté is Cuban but living in the United States. After their relationship is over, Mayté feels guilty for having cheated on her husband and wants to tell him. Laura, on the other hand, cannot understand Mayté's desire to cause trouble: "Hay cosas que no se dicen, era su lema" (23). Perhaps we can equate Martirio's use of the term "affair" to Mayté's feelings of guilt over her extra-marital relationship.

⁹ I use Irigaray's metaphors of the "two lips" and the "phallus" to analyze the differences between these two texts, but not to suggest an essentialized notion of feminine and masculine pleasure or of the psychology of male and female homosexual subjects.

¹⁰ As Susana Peña argues in her essay "Obvious Gays," oftentimes a subject's identity is constructed by a governing body—an institution that relies upon a "selective gaze" to determine who is classified as gay, transgressive, or other (508). For these protagonists and other homosexual subjects in exile, this is certainly the case. Though they are able to negotiate their identities through disidentificatory spaces, the fact remains that under the gaze of society they are doubly other, both exile and homosexual at once. As Muñoz states, disidentification "is *not always* an adequate strategy of resistance or survival for all minority subjects" (5).

¹¹ It may be interesting to add that Casey dealt with death in complex ways in many of his other works, namely in his short story "The Master of Life and Death," in which escaping time comes only through death. In "Piazza Margana," however, the dichotomy between life and death is lessened with the introduction of a third option, a disidentificatory existence in a lover's body.

¹² It is important to note here that the real-life Casey is not able to create a lasting disidentificatory space either. As Pérez-Firmat has commented, this final statement—"I have entered the Kingdom of Heaven and taken proud possession of it. This is my private claim, my heritage, my fief. I am NOT leaving"—is ironic. Casey, of course, commits suicide shortly after writing the story. For the author himself, then, this disidentificatory space is only fanciful. The real-life Casey acknowledges that the only

way to escape the constraints of the dominant culture and political persecution is suicide. Louis A. Pérez Jr.'s contention that Cubans equate suicide with martyrdom also adds an interesting dimension to Casey's suicide. If we follow Pérez's argument, Casey's suicide might represent the ultimate sacrifice to his culture, and the ultimate move to reconcile with his motherland, Cuba. For more on the representation of suicide in Cuban society see Louis A. Pérez Jr.'s *To Die in Cuba: Suicide and Society*.

¹³ Although Muñoz states that disidentification must “hold on to and even *risk* utopianism,” I would argue that utopianism makes up only one part of the disidentificatory strategy (25). Whereas a utopia implies an ideal space that is imaginary, disidentification implies a space that has been consciously constructed from real world conditions. As such I reject Emilio Bejel's reading of the final sex scene between Martirio and Rocío as a “lesbian utopia” (233).

¹⁴ Starting in the 1990s, writing and films dealing with homosexual issues began to appear more frequently in Cuba, under the unspoken approval of the Cuban government. This produced such well-known texts as Senel Paz's 1991 story “El lobo, el bosque, y el hombre nuevo,” and its internationally acclaimed 1993 film adaptation, *Fresa y chocolate*. Additionally, during the '90s the Cuban government showed an increasing acceptance of homosexual texts written in the diaspora, as evidenced by Sonia Rivera-Valdés becoming only the second Cuban outside Cuba to be awarded the Casa de Las Americas literary prize in 1997 for *Las historias prohibidas de Marta Veneranda*. For more information on homosexual works released in Cuba during the 1990s, see chapter 10 in Emilio Bejel's *Gay Cuban Nation*.

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