Even by 1986 (4 years before the publication of  *Antes Que Anochezca*) Reinaldo Arenas had already been noted as “significant addition to the Cuban exile community” by a bibliography of Cuban exile writers (Souza, 1986, p. 4) . Arenas’ autobiography, *Antes Que Anochezca*, was finished right before his suicide and was published posthumously. It is worth exploring the ways in which it can be considered a work of exile literature considering that it is a non-fiction memoir. There is, of course, a debate over who counts as an exile (Glad, 1990) . This essay will refer to exile literature as literature written by a person who cannot stay in their homeland as it is unsafe for them to do so. This will be achieved through exploring the semantics of the term “exile literature”; the causes of Arenas’ exile; and the way in which *Antes Que Anochezca* and Reinaldo Arenas fit into the wider Cuban-American exile community. This  essay will attempt to demonstrate that, although exile is a prominent aspect *of Antes Que Anochezca*, it would be reductive to restrict the interpretation of Arenas’ work to that alone, and ignore the other underlying aspects such as Arenas’ wish for freedom.

Arenas’ discussion of exile as primarily having a feeling of loss agrees with scholarly discussion on the topic. Brodsky (1995, cited in Meerzon, 2017, p 17), in his essay ‘Anchors Aweigh’, argues that exile was a primarily psychological, philosophical and existential condition characterised by displacement loss and homelessness. On the one hand, in *Antes Que Anochezca*, for Arenas, the greatest advantage of exile is freedom - he describes how in New York “vivía ahora mi tiempo perdido y de nuevo casi recobrado” (Arenas, 2006, p. 327). However, he rejects New York as a home ("yo nunca ni aspiré ni aspiro a ser ciudadano norteamericano” (Arenas, 2006 p. 320)) and instead there is an overriding feeling of grief associated with his exile.

Although he may still call Cuba "mi país" (Arenas, 2006, p. 343), his status as an exile is marked by a state of not belonging ("no podemos encontrar sosiego en ningún lugar" (Arenas, 2006, p. 330)). Instead, he suffers from "padeciendo todas las calamidades del destierro" (Arenas, 2006, p. 115) – a word literally meaning "no-land". The feeling of isolation is so great that eventually he forms a “hermandad” (Arenas, 2006, p. 331) with Lázaro Gomez Carriles as he is the only one who had suffered the same “veinte años de persecución” (Arenas, 2006, p. 330) that define Arenas. His suicide note (“para ser publicada” Arenas, 2006, p. 343) summarises his existence in exile as experiencing “suffrimientos de exilio, penas de destierro y la soledad". His description of contemporary Castroist Cuba as a "contrapaís" (Arenas, 2006, p. 322) with a wish to annihilate ("aniquilarnos" (Arenas, 2006 p. 322) ) the Cuban exile community further marks his alienation in exile as well as a solidarity with other Cuban exiles.

Yana Meerzon develops Brodsky’s definition,  calling exile a concept that invites us to speak about “humanitarian and ethical values” (forcing us to understand others’ “eminence as human beings” (Meerzon, 2017, p. 30)). Arenas’ autobiography fits this definition as it explores his life and acts as an individual testimony. The book takes the form of  a series of personal memories and reflections including his childhood, nature and his battle with AIDS, with references to external events such as the Prague Spring. The presence of the suicide note (“para ser publicada”- (Arenas, 2006, p. 343) ) cement the idea that *Antes Que Anochezca* is a  personal retrospective on the author’s life. It can be seen that this is a personal publication given the fact that Arenas alternates between taking the time to detail the lives of those who he met after their meeting, or just briefly mentioning them. This “looking back” and “nostalgia” is part of “dominant critical perspective of exile literature” according to Caminero-Santangelo (2000, p. 507) . While “nostalgia” may not be a term to describe Arenas’ retrospectives (he includes graphic descriptions of slaughtered animals as part of his childhood), looking back onto the country in which he had spent his life conforms with this presentation of exile. The looking at the past to inform the present has also been noted by Isabel Alvarez-Borland (1994) in relation to exile literature, when discussing autobiographical and fictional texts.  *Antes Que Anochezca* can therefore be seen as a response to the trauma of exile as it conveys the author’s personal experiences and therefore contextualises them.

As Arenas’ exile is a result of a hostile environment to him, it is worth examining the reasons for his exile. He himself says that his exile is so isolating because “el sufrimiento nos marcó para siempre" (Arenas, 2006 p. 330). Additionally, *The Oxford Book of Exile* asserts that being  “driven back" is the “defining experience of exile” (Simpson, 1995 p. 1) .  In Arenas' case, this system is the "puritanismo castrista" (Arenas, 2006, p. 187 ), which attempts to establish total control over its citizens.  One facet of his "conflict” with his surroundings (for which he has been noted in Souza, (1986, p.4)) is his insistence on total  intellectual freedom. He therefore praises authors like Lezama Lima and Virigilio Piñera for their "honestidad intelectual" (Arenas, 2006, p. 110) , but the reader notices its ultimate futility as: "tanto Lezama como Virgilio terminaron su vida en el ostracismo y abandonados por sus amigos” ((Arenas, 2006, p. 110) . He also  describes how he sees t as his duty to release books and talk to foreign journalists, opposing the system that restricts freedom (“nos encargamos de aclararsela: campos de concentración, persecuciones, censura, cárceles repletas" (Arenas, 2006 p. 142)) and openly scorning the "cobardes" (Arenas, 2006, pp, 13, 310 ) that sided with the Castro regime.

Part of Arenas’ struggle for intellectual freedom can be explained by the oppression of his sexuality as it did not conform with the official  Castroist image of “el hombre nuevo” (Arenas, 2006, pp. 73, 131).  He describes the conflict between the homosexual scene of the 1970s ("subterránea pero muy evidente"( Arenas, 2006, p. 130) and the increasing oppression of the Castro regime (“se desató la persecución contra ellos y se crearon las campos de concentración” (Arenas, 2006, p.131). There is an irony in the fact that many of Arenas’ lovers were from the institutions responsible for his oppression, namely the police and military.  As Souza (1986, p. 5) points out, these struggles made his country inhospitable to him and his books written in Cuba have an aspect of internal exile. The suppression of these freedoms and his continual opposition ultimately culminates in his arrest and imprisonment where he is forced to sign a  confession disavowing his views (“todo quedó como que yo era un contrarrevolucionario…y que ahora me arrepentía…también prometía rehabilitarme sexualmente” (Arenas, 2006, p. 240)). This makes his position in Cuba untenable. Therefore, Arenas’ description of his life in Cuba acts to clarify his life in exile and therefore it acts as another way *Antes Que Anochezca* is a work of exile literature.

It should also be noted that Arenas’  focus on freedom through opposition to oppression is constant. He talks about his sexuality from a very young age ( “Creo que siempre tuve una gran voracidad sexual.” (Arenas, 2006, p. 39)) and describes his relationships bluntly. He also discusses the sexual relationships of his friends, including Virgilio Piñera, rejecting the stifling “machismo” (Arenas, 2006, pp. 75, 131) of both Castroist Cuba and his childhood.  His focus on freedom is also evident from a young age as he describes the terror of Batista's dictatorship (“el terror ya era una cosa cotidiana" (Arenas, 2006, p. 62)), and the freedom of his childhood (“mi infancia fue... en la absoluta Libertad” (Arenas, 2006, p. 22)) The reader therefore should not only see the theme of freedom in relation to his exile, but as a constant throughout his life. This is a view supported by the penultimate sentence in his suicide note: “Cuba será libre” (Arenas, 2006, p. 343), an uncompromising position written in the future tense, with a clear focus on freedom.

Arenas' book can be viewed as a work of exile in the way it correlates with the opinions of the Cuban exile community.  The Cuban community in America has been thoroughly studied and the “exile ideology” (Grenier, 2006) of the Cuban diaspora is often a large aspect of the community’s identity, especially in Miami. Marina García stresses that “Cubans see themselves as exiles, not as immigrants” (Garcia, 2006, p. 4). Andrew Lynch that “Anti-Castroism is a key factor of one’s social identity in the Miami Cuban community” (Lynch, 2009, p. 27).

Arenas’ book shows solidarity with the Cuban community in America, succinctly stating “no tenemos un país sino un contrapaís” (Arenas, 2006 p. 322), clearly rejecting Castro’s regime and fitting into wider Cuban American discourse. In his introduction, he describes how, while ill with AIDS, he wrote an open letter to Castro calling for a plebiscite (Arenas, 2006 p. 13). It is clear that as part of his exile, he clearly opposes the Castro regime even while ill . Most notably, in his final suicide note he blames Castro (“solo hay un responsable: Fidel Castro” (Arenas, 2006, p. 343).

Arenas’ rejection of Castro’s regime extends to spurning  the “díalogueros” those who rejected the dominant uncompromising narrative in relation to Castro, and “articulated accommodationist views” (García p. 16)) as those who are completely unfamiliar with Castro’s open disdain of democracy (Arenas, 2006, pp. 13, 14 ). This is in line with the Miami Cuban community (Garcia, p. 16). Arenas concludes that they are  people who “colaboraron con el tirano” ( Arenas, 2006, p. 14), and therefore “el pueblo de Cuba… les ahorcarrá” (Arenas, 2006, p. 14) when Castro falls from power. Here, there  is another parallel with the dominant Cuban Exile narrative: Arenas reveals his belief that Castro will fall from power (“la gente derrocará Castro”( Arenas, 2006, p. 14)), which he shares in common with most first-generation Cuban migrants, (García 1998, p.4)

As well as being a Cuban exile, Arena describes the disconnect between him and the established Miami community in Cuba. He rejects the exile community in Miami as “la caricatura de Cuba” (Arenas, 2006 p. 313), due to an expectation to turn into an “hombrecito machista” (Arenas, 2006, p313) The fact that Arena refuses the “típica tradición machista cubana en Miami”( Arenas, 2006, p. 313) again emphasises Arenas’ wish for personal freedom. He even rejects the nature of the area, (un paisaje que no tenía siquiera la belleza insular, era una especie de fantasma de la isla'' (Arenas, 2006, p. 313),  a symptom of his “looking back” to Cuba as his homeland (Caminero-Santangelo 2000, p. 507), and his new-found alienation This conflict may be representative of the tension between the already established Cuban-American population who fled when Castro came to power, and the second wave of migrants that became known as Marielitos. Lynch (2009, p. 26) notes that due to the fact that they “had lived most if not all of their life under the Castro regime, their social and economic beliefs often contrasted with those of early exiles”.

In conclusion, *Antes Que Anochezca* can undoubtedly be seen as a work of exile in the ways Arenas’ experience of exile correlates closely with that of the Cuban American; he explores the causes of his exile; and his experience in exile, which is contextualised by the autobiography. It is important to stress, however, that Arenas’ emphasis on freedom is a constant part of his writing and the reason for his exile itself, so should be not be overshadowed by the memoir’s classification as a piece of specifically Cuban Exile literature. Due to restraints on the length of this essay, it was not possible to further discuss how *Antes Que Anochezca* explores exile compares to his earlier work, though this would be a fruitful area of study to explore.

Bibliography

Alvarez-Borland, I., 1994. ‘Displacements and Autobiography in Cuban-American Fiction’. *World Literature Today*, 68(1), p.43.

Arenas, R. 2006. *Antes que Anochezca*. 6th edition. Barcelona: Tusquets.

Caminero-Santangelo, M., 2000. Contesting the Boundaries of "Exile" Latino/A Literature. *World Literature Today*, 74(3), p.507.

Garcia, M. C., 1998. ‘Hardliners v. "Dialogueros": Cuban Exile Political Groups and United States-Cuba Policy’. *Journal of American Ethnic History* Vol. 17, No. 4 (1998), pp. 3-28.

Glad, J., 1990. ‘Preface’ in Glad, J.,, *Literature in exile*. 1st ed Durham [etc.]: Duke University Press, i-viii.

Grenier, G., 2017. Engage or Isolate? Twenty years of Cuban Americans’ Changing Attitudes towards Cuba—Evidence from the FIU Cuba Poll. *IdeAs*, (10).

Lynch, A., 2009. ‘Expression of cultural standing in Miami: Cuban Spanish discourse about Fidel Castro and Cuba’. *Revista Internacional de Lingüística Iberoamericana,* Vol. 7, No. 2 (14), pp. 21-48.

Simpson, J., 1995. *The Oxford book of exile*. 1st ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, i- p. 1.

Souza, R. D., 1985. ‘Exiles in the Cuban literary experience’ in Maratos, D. and Hill, M., 1986. *Escritores de la diáspora Cubana*. 1st ed. Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow, pp. 4-5.

Meerzon,Y., 2017. ‘On the Paradigms of Banishment, Displacement, and Free Choice’ in Rudakoff, J., 2017. *Performing exile*. 1st ed. Intellect, pp. 17-33.