

Received: May 22, 2016  
Accepted: Jun 11, 2016  
Original scholarly paper  
UDC 821.134.2(729.1).09-31 Валдес С.

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## **The Subject and Perception of Exile in the Works of Zoé Valdés. *Everyday Nothing* and *Everyday Everything***

**Abstract:** The subject of exile and the political element are two main themes of two related but independent novels by Zoé Valdés: *Everyday Nothing* and *Everyday Everything*,<sup>1</sup> in which she reveals her ideology by using techniques specific to contemporary Cuban literature created in exile. In addition to being narrative instead of political and journalistic novels, and despite other common elements, these two works are connected by the subject of exile. Their framework is different, as well as the content, time, and the message, but their ideology is the same. These novels have been chosen for this research paper from Valdés's large opus because they deal with the same subject from different perspectives – exile as an idea, a vision of possible salvation, the exile from exile – thus allowing us to carry out an in-depth analysis of this eternal topic. There is a profound difference in the experience of exile, as well as in the approach to this subject. The novels portray Cuban society in two different time frames, with many similarities and differences between them, while also depicting different stages of Valdés personal development as a writer.

**Keywords:** Cuba, exile, dictatorship, Cuban literature, Zoé Valdés

*“Por que algo mejor que nada?” (“Why is something better than nothing?”)*<sup>2</sup>

The novel *Everyday Nothing* begins with the quote from Emil Cioran with whom Valdés shares her personal attitude towards birth as a misfortune and whom she often

<sup>1</sup> Soe Valdes, *Svakodnevno ništavilo*, Beograd, Paidea, 1999; Zoé Valdés, *El todo cotidiano*, Barcelona, Planeta, 2010.

<sup>2</sup> Emil Cioran (Romania 1911–France 1995) is a Romanian philosopher and essayist. His philosophy expresses pessimism with central topics including alienation, absurdity, boredom, futility, decay, tyranny of history, vulgarity of change, consciousness as agony, reason as illness. Cioran's departure to France marks an ideological and literary milestone. His most important works are written in French: *A Short History of Decay*, *All Gall is Divided*, *History & Utopia*, *The Fall into Time* and *The Trouble with Being Born*, most of which are translated into the Serbian language.

quotes as a teacher and a constant skeptic of a dying world. Cioran's contemplation, "*The fact that life has no meaning is a reason to live, moreover the only one*", even in exile, emigration and consequently lifelong misery, is the pillar and main message of two novels by Valdés, *Everyday Nothing* and *Everyday Everything*.

Exile is very common in our present world. We see it every day. Countless people are emigrating and that state of temporary residence, the cause of constant discomfort, compels the person in exile to reflect on what is truly important in life. Another result of this modern phenomenon is abundant literature that is created in exile or deals with this subject. Very frequently, these writers draw on exile as their inspiration and the only mode of existence.

One of the representatives of this literature is dissident Valdés, a rare example of a female writer in exile. During the last century, exile of writers became a frequent phenomenon, owing to wars, dictatorships and genocides all over the world. In Cuban literature, writing *in* and *about* exile, works dealing with rejection and non-belonging – whether voluntary or imposed – appear quite early. They reached culmination during the 1990s, in the aftermath of various exoduses, and were particularly inspired by the events of that time<sup>3</sup> when many writers were forced to make that step – to flee into exile, often illegally. There are three aspects in the narrative fiction: text, history and fiction. Narration is the only concrete structure for history. This research paper deals with the literary work as a form of ideological guidance.

As part of the historic aspect, characters can have a symbolic or metaphorical meaning, while the text itself is interesting because of the language. The subject, exile, unites the content and the framework. The objective is a political message heightened by the interaction of the subject, history, characters and language.

### **Special Position of Cuba in Modern World**

After decades of many compromises, socialist and communist utopias in the wake of the Cuban Revolution (1959), the beginning of the battle against the same and free ideas (1968), the 1970s and 1980s were marked by bloody dictatorships, a sequence of civil wars and the gradual disappearance of old ideas, which was inevitably followed by polarization of intellectuals between those who supported the ruling regime and those who could not accept it.

Cuba is one of the last socialist-communist countries in the world. As such, it has been a subject of many international debates over the past decades regarding its economic problems and the future of Castro's regime that ended up in isolation.

There are numerous writers who left the country, carrying with them their own unique life stories, usually disturbing and sad, and each of them has left a strong, personal and memorable mark on this extraordinary literature in terms of subject,

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<sup>3</sup> The Mariel boatlift, Cuban rafter crisis, exodus of Cuban migrants to Miami.

attitude towards the regime, and inability to ever return home, at least as long as the current regime is ruling. Many have never returned – the exile was too long and the regime has not changed. The following writers did not return to Cuba: Guillermo Cabrera Infante, Virgilio Piñera, Heberto Padilla. The ones still in exile are: Armando de Armas, Amir Valle, Zoé Valdés, Abilio Estévez, and many others more. From the 1990s onwards, these writers frequently appear under peculiar names such as: *mutants*, *pettit bum*, *planetary*, and very often they call themselves *sons and daughters of globalization*.<sup>4</sup>

### Zoé Valdés: Life, Literary Work and Ideology

Zoé Valdés was born in Havana, on 2 May 1959, the same year when the Cuban revolution triumphed. She was the first generation of the youth educated in the spirit of the revolution's victory. In mid 1980s, she left for France. She returned to Cuba in 1988 and took part in the art movement believing it could be a way to usher in changes. In early 1990s, her problems with the regime became more serious. Her continuous and direct opposition to Castro's regime accelerated her definite exile to Paris in 1995. Since then, she has lived and worked in Paris. Her work is censored in her homeland and can be obtained only at the black market. Almost the entirety of Valdés's work revolves around the exile-related experience, supported by her personal struggle, always very intimately portrayed. It is related to the Cuban island country encompassing both worlds in fiction and reality: island-solitude and exile-solitude. She makes a clear distinction between the exile and emigration, terms that are usually confused. Her political literary voice is by far the strongest among the contemporary Cuban writers in exile. The works of Valdés deal with subjects typical of female writing, but almost always in the centre, or in the background, or as a nightmare, the subject of exile appears, filled with nostalgia, pain, and longing. Modern critics usually categorize Valdés into the most recent genre, *literatura de urgencia* (urgent literature). Her works demonstrate wide culture, vast knowledge of history and literature, with quotes from famous writers, both classic and modern. The first published work, the book of poems *Responses to Life (Respuestas para vivir)*, appeared in 1986, followed by *All for a Shadow (Todo para una sombra)*, 1986, *Poems about Havana (Los poemas de La Habana)*, 1997, and *Moon Earrings (Los aretas de la luna)*, 1999. Her entire opus is imbued with lyrical tones, together with the obsessions and passions of constant evocation and returning to her hometown. She published her first novel *Blue Blood (Sangre azul)* in 1993. In 1995, when she made her permanent residence in Paris, she published the novel *Ambassador's Daughter (La hija del embajador)*. Soon afterwards, she published one of her best-known books, *Everyday Nothing (La nada cotidiana)*, 1995, where she speaks of the adventures of a Cuban girl going through her formative period during the first years of the Cuban revolution. This is the novel that

<sup>4</sup> Common names in Cuba for the generation of writers that began to publish in the 1990s.

brought her international acclaim and popularity, with translations in more than 20 languages, and which was followed by a kind of a sequel, *Everyday Everything* (*El todo cotidiano*, 2010). Novels that followed include *I Gave You All I Had* (*Te di la vida entera*, 1996), *The Nostalgia Cafe* (*Café Nostalgia*, 1997), *Dear First Love* (*Querido primer novio*, 1999), *A Miracle in Miami* (*Milagro en Miami*, 2001), *Sea She-Wolves* (*Lobas de mar*, 2003), *The Eternity of a Moment* (*La eternidad del instante*, 2004), *Dancing with Life* (*Bailar con la vida*, 2006), *Woman Star-Hunter* (*La cazadora de astros*, 2007), and *Fiction Fidel* (*La ficción Fidel*, 2007). The already-mentioned novel *Everyday Everything* (2010) is a sequel to *Everyday Nothing*, but is also an independent novel. And in her latest novel, published in April 2013, titled *A Weeping Woman* (*La mujer que llora*), she returns to her everlasting inspirations, art and love. The protagonist is Dora Maar.

### The Novel *Everyday Nothing*: Summary and Subject of Exile

Among the approximately 40 literary works by Valdés, the two novels *Everyday Nothing* and *Everyday Everything* stand out. They are connected to a large extent, but at the same time, each of them has its own structure and mission. What connects them is the common poetics and characters. What divides them is the 15-year gap. The saddest thing is that there were no major changes in the meantime. Valdés finished the novel *Everyday Nothing* in summer 1994, shortly before the well-known rafter crisis in Cuba. The printing was banned in Havana, but she managed to secretly smuggle the manuscript and find a publisher in France, even before doing so in Spain. The novel soon achieved enormous success and earning widespread recognition, both by the general public and critics. It begins with the epitaph by Marguerite Yourcenar.<sup>5</sup> Valdés was full of fears, the fears faced by writers at the beginning of their career, as well as those fears typical for all women. The devastated country entered the so-called special period (when Russians left Cuba and also withdrew their economic support). “There is no room for free ideas or criticism, there is even no food. Political prisoners are everywhere.”<sup>6</sup>

In *Everyday Nothing*, the author describes her everyday life. Days go by, nothing happens, there is no hope, no future. At the very beginning, the protagonist Patria is talking to her anger, explaining why she must leave. Her voice is that of nothingness. Her story begins and ends with the same words:

<sup>5</sup> Marguerite Yourcenar (1903–1987), French novelist, storywriter and essayist who gained worldwide acclaim with the historical and metaphysical novels featuring characters from the distant past. She published her debut novel *Alexis* in 1929. Her following works have particular importance for us: *Oriental Tales* (1938), with three subjects originating from the Serbian epic tradition (*Smile of Kraljević Marko*, *Building of Skadar* and *The End of Kraljević Marko*). She earned worldwide success with *Memoirs of Hadrian* (1951) and *The Abyss* (1968). She spent most of her life in the United States. Marguerite Yourcenar was the first woman to be elected to the French Academy (1980). Her literary opus is completed by other works (*Farewell Blow*, *Labyrinth*, *Legends of Centuries*, *Wreath and Lyre*, etc.).

<sup>6</sup> *El Mundo*, Madrid, XXVII, April 2007, 3-5.

“She comes from an island that had wanted to build paradise. The fire of aggression consumes her face. Her eyes are almost always moist, her mouth is imploring, like a bronze statue, her nose pointed. She is like any other woman, except that she opens her eyes in the manner of the island women: beneath her eyelids lurks quiet indifference.”<sup>7</sup>

The main character lives intensively, takes everything she can out of life. What was supposed to be paradise is now hell; everything is a ruin and destruction, everything is everyday nothing. An idea of departure is born, to go somewhere, anywhere. The subject of exile is introduced gradually, little by little. The title of the first chapter is sarcastic: *Morir por la patria es vivir* (‘to die for the motherland is to live’ – V. S.), a typical slogan of the communist revolution, written all over Cuba.

Patria has an internal monologue with herself. She opens the windows to reality on Cuba, which is far different from the image it attempts to present to the world, that of a pearl of the Caribbean, heaven on earth.

“On her island, every part of the body learned to resist. Sacrifice was the order of the day, as was nothingness. To die and to live: the same verb as to laugh.”<sup>8</sup>

The subject of exile is fuelled by the fire of existence. She writes in order to tell someone, to express her rage, but also to get revenge, to understand herself.

“Just as she thinks she must go, her strength suddenly leaves her ... She will always have to leave, and always lose strength, lose hope ... lose herself ... There will always be a place, a country waiting for us, a *nada* waiting for us ... a tender nothingness.”<sup>9</sup>

In an excellent research by Dinora Cardoso, she emphasizes: “Patria’s struggle to gain her personal identity, independent from her parents, takes her to the point that she is overseeing both of them, especially her father. That is why she accentuates her father’s lack of formal education and his blind belief in what he calls the Revolution.”<sup>10</sup>

The years are passing, exile has entered the lives of people all around, the promised paradise became hell dominated by frustration, indifference and hopelessness. Exile is the only salvation here. Friends are leaving, fleeing one after the other, searching for a better life. Those who left: Linse, Gusana, and Mariela were forced to. Here, Valdés makes it clear that they do not emigrate because they wanted to. Theirs was a forced exile. This is a matter of sheer existence. Stay and die or leave and live. It is not an elite emigration, such as when Alejo Carpentier and his generation departed to France, to expand their horizons, meet other intellectuals. This is a forced exile with no return. The regime does not allow anyone to come back. They even lose their civil rights, if they even have any. They do not have anything else.

<sup>7</sup> Zoé Valdés, *La nada cotidiana*, Barcelona, Emece Narrativa, 1998, 15.

<sup>8</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 16.

<sup>10</sup> Dinora Cardoso and Ynés Oggel, “Self-actualization is paradise in *La Nada Cotidiana* by Zoé Valdés”, *Journal of Caribbean Literatures*, Vol. VI, Issue 2, Fall 2009, 10, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40981275>, ac. 15 March 2016.

“The poll of death hangs heavily over Havana because it has lost one more illustrious citizen. [...] Don’t be seduced by that slut homesickness, the Cuban syndrome. Endure it, suffer, but don’t let it obsess you. Make it your food for the soul and not poison.”<sup>11</sup>

As Catherine Davies states in her book *A Place in the Sun, Everyday Nothing* is not only a novel that presents the misery and despair spread all over Cuba by Castroism. “It if was only that, this novel would have no future as literary work. But, no. It is so representative because this situation is presented within the characters, it infuses them and makes them tragic everyday people, just like in Greek tragedies, they make everything find its purpose in their own personal frustration.”<sup>12</sup>

*Everyday Nothing* presents daily exile, an exile of a young Cuban girl dreaming of her literary fame while everything around her is sinking.

“This sleep – so deep lasted for the four years I spent in that far-off country – a European country, to be precise – where I was transformed in the devoted wife. I played the role of Sleeping Homely, the mistreated woman cast adrift, forever fearing the sentence that could destroy everything, the thunder that would wake me up.”<sup>13</sup>

“I have come to the conclusion that the most important act in my life is waking up. Waking up from the lethargy imposed by the weight of reality. Waking up each morning and drinking a cup of coffee while confirming that the sea is indeed still there, and caressing it with my eyes through the blinds of my hexagonal refuge.”<sup>14</sup>

The dominant subject of her personal exile and its interpretation as a possible salvation is imbued with the sense of nostalgia throughout the novel. “Do you remember those frozen tarts on the corner of Avenue Prado and Neptuno Street? Do you remember the Rialto movie house where they used to show art films? Do you remember the croquettes they called Soyuz, which stuck to the roof of your mouth?”<sup>15</sup>

The poverty that pushes one into exile, the struggle for life that makes the eyes open wide and leads one to analyze things, are all things that comfortable life does not encourage. Thus, the novel is full of allusions, comments, and plenty of history. The cultural scope presented is necessarily wide, typical for a well-educated Cuban writer versed in Russian classics as well as Spanish, because of language, and French, due to tendencies. In addition, philosophically the novel is rooted somewhat in French existentialism. Even if we exclude the historical perspective of nothingness, there are parallels with Jean-Paul Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness*, which marked global philosophy of the 1950s and 1960s. It would be worthwhile to analyze *Everyday Nothing* taking into consideration two notions that Sartre deals with: freedom and choice.

<sup>11</sup> Zoé Valdés, *La nada cotidiana*, op. cit., 26.

<sup>12</sup> Catherine Davies, *A Place in the Sun. Women Writers in Twentieth-Century Cuba*, London–New Jersey, Zed Books Ltd., 1997, 10.

<sup>13</sup> Zoé Valdés, *La nada cotidiana*, op. cit., 60.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, 69.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, 171.

Almost forty years after the publication of the superb novels of Cuban existentialism: *La trampa* (*The Trap*) by Enrique Serpa and *El acoso* (*Persecution*) by Alejo Carpentier (both published in 1956), *Everyday Nothing* continues this ideological line of Cuban literary existentialism, and earning great international success as well.

For Valdés, this is the novel-catharsis. Even though the opponents accused her of being an opportunist, the price she paid to publish this novel was enormous. It is evident that this novel is of paramount importance for Cuban literature in exile, for contemporary Hispano-American literature, as well as for world literature that is less and less categorized as female writing. This was a necessary novel. Valdés is a pioneer in setting this topic, a specific Cuban internal exile that is both a salvation and a punishment and never ceases to attract attention.

Sad countries like Cuba need writers like Valdés, writers who are ready to put pen to paper at the risk of being declared traitors and immoral dissidents. It is somehow a universal trait of writers dealing with the subject of exile and living in exile. This novel can only be understood from within, from that bridge between the conscious and unconscious, which is highlighted in the narration as being written in third person. It ends as it begins. An eternal circle, round.

### **The Novel *Everyday Everything*: Summary and the Subject of Exile**

Fifteen years following the publication of *Everyday Nothing*, the novel *Everyday Everything* was published, in 2010. The novel is the continuation of the first, but is an atypical sequel, as it can be read independently. Primarily, it finalizes the subject of exile while also dealing with art, painting and surrealism. Here, Valdés displays a world-weary, mature understanding: the world is imperfect and freedom does not exist, only the illusion of freedom. Exile is not salvation, but punishment. A bitter tone underscores the text, despite many comic scenes.

Now everything is re-evaluated from a distance, from emigration, which is simultaneously exile, forced by others. This novel is a discussion of many values, rewards, wars, and globalization. It particularly stresses that exile is indeed the only way to reach freedom in the case of Cuba; however that is not a gift, but eternal pain. Nor is it freedom, only illusion. Exile is thus vividly portrayed with an example of a Parisian apartment block filled with Cubans. But there is also a Polish girl, a Russian girl, a married couple from Norway, and a man from Brazil. Thus, Valdés attempts to globalize the subject, particularly the loss of roots, while maintaining the only resistance to exile is through language. It is wrong to think of an emigrant as of someone who abdicated or someone who withdraws into his own misery and the outcast status. A closer look reveals his ambition and aggression in his disappointments, his bitterness and evident pugnacity. The more we are deprived of our rights, the bigger appetite and illusions we have. But how can we impose our name if it is written in a language that is not recognized or is even despised by the local population? Should we adopt a

different manner of expression? It would be difficult to renounce the words that carry one's history; abandoning one's own language for another forsakes identity and causes disillusion; one breaks with one's memories and, to an extent, oneself. "One is always trying to hold onto his language like to a life-jacket."<sup>16</sup>

"She tried to fight with culture, to make a difference, but there was no progress, no opportunity. Between prison and exile, she chose exile. It was not a mistake to go back. It was a mistake to believe that a country could be saved with various expressions of culture. She endured as much as she could; prison or exile. Exile."<sup>17</sup>

After so many years, she discusses with Marcel the same topics: exile, weaknesses, disappointments, traps, false morale, etc. "The worst thing is that in exile you no longer return naturally anywhere. Everything seems like an endless movie."<sup>18</sup>

For her mother, exile is like being born again. She was not melancholic when she arrived to Paris near the end of her life. She enjoyed the new things, the freedom of thought and word, and she never wanted to return to Cuba again. "Down with Fidel! Long live free Cuba! That is a sentence I wanted to scream all these years. And look, nothing is happening."<sup>19</sup> And herself, portrayed in the character of Yocandra, a woman who is still young, aware that her life will pass by, does not share that joy, because she knows that it could be different were she not in exile, that she will be melancholy for the rest of her life – and there is still plenty of time ahead. The perspective is different owing to her age. She is now a mature woman and due to her experience she has lower expectations. "When life is only that, a road at the end, and the body is only an empty bag where you throw events, passing anecdotes, everyday everything, like little paper balls."<sup>20</sup>

Much of this novel is devoted to issues of contemporary politics, tempered with mediations on restlessness. "How far have we come, how slow the global changes are, but in Cuba there are no changes at all. A frozen island."<sup>21</sup> "Time of terrorist attacks, time of war, time when a black man became the president of the United States ... But none of this happened at once, no, time is too long in exile." I do not believe any more in anything, I only believe in literature, I have faith in writers that make me feel scared of life and confident in art, writers like Jorge Luis Borges [...]"<sup>22</sup>

In *Everyday Everything* the entire world portrayed in *Everyday Nothing* has changed completely – except for the dictatorship in Havana. Over the course of 52 years it seems as if the world has simply made a pact with it. "Here, on our prison-island, we are madder, more suicidal every day. Jails are crammed, prostitution and corruption govern the country. Batista's rule was nothing compared to everything that

<sup>16</sup> Zoé Valdés, *El todo cotidiano*, Barcelona, Planeta, 2010, 29.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 42.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 64.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 94.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 122.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 112.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 133.



was imposed on this people by these demented ones.”<sup>23</sup> “The biggest misery is ignorance, lack of human rights. Children go to school dressed as pioneers but they barely have anything to eat.”<sup>24</sup>

Valdés emphasizes that in exile, a person is always forced to choose the company of friends that they would never have chosen on Cuba. As one feels lonely and abandoned, one tries to form bonds with everyone and everything sharing the same roots, even at the risk of choosing incorrectly.

### **Similarities and Differences in the Perception and Experience of Exile in Two Novels Separated by a 15-Year Gap**

In real life as well as in her novels, Valdés, having been banished by Castro’s regime as a dissident and living in exile in Paris, makes the arduous journey from nothing to everything, from *Everyday Nothing* to *Everyday Everything*. Such differences are evident in the character of Yocandra. In the first novel she is young and rebellious; by the second, she looks back upon her life, with a tired maturity, feeling manipulated. Whereas she arrives in exile fed up and with few illusions, she is nonetheless highly idealistic about freedom, and acts impulsively, mindful of time and eager to see changes in her country. Now, in the second novel, she is even more aware of the ways of the world and its widespread vanity. The title itself, *Everyday Everything*, refers to this realization, and to freedom itself. Somehow, Valdés is telling us that everything – the freedom, its illusion – is still reachable, and that the satisfaction that follows is bitter. Ironically, quite often, because of the trauma caused by dictatorship, one doesn’t know what to do with freedom once it is finally obtained.

Valdés describes her personal path, from Havana to Paris, from nothing to everything, from dictatorship to freedom. She openly admits that the novels are largely autobiographical, mixed with a great deal of fiction, a kind of metafiction. Both novels demonstrate that an exile never returns to his or her homeland, which only continues to exist in one’s consciousness, recollection and memories.

Both novels are filled with examples of political satire, humor, irony and absurdity, as well as rage and discontent. The argumentation is more subjective than objective. Exaggeration is evident. The characters in both novels have negative attitudes towards developments in Cuba, both in their youth and older age. With this, Valdés stresses that people’s unhappiness does not depend on the country, but the regime. The clever ones go to exile and continue their struggle there, even though they do not see the possibility of success. With that struggle, at least, they justify their departure. In a way, Valdés presented fundamental images of Cuba in *Everyday Nothing* and she did not modify them in all other novels to come.

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 137.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 152.

The first novel is entirely written from within, it criticizes the present day she lives in, while in *Everyday Everything* she is criticizing the situation in a distant country – her own, but this time from distance, from exile. On one hand, we have an authentic *corpus delicti* of a Cuban girl from mid-1990s, and on the other, we are presented with an existential retrospective of a woman in exile in Paris, after fifteen years. “I wept for all of those who appeared in *Everyday Nothing* and for all of them who follow me now in *Everyday Everything*.”<sup>25</sup>

### **Cuba from Valdés Perspective and the Exile**

Valdés’s personal drama is the exile, dictatorship and the fact that the world is not what it should be. A Cuban in exile is no longer Cuban, he or she does not represent himself but rather the Cuban revolution; he or she is a product of its marketing. If you one is a Cuban in exile, one arouses much doubt about oneself, which was not the case with the dictatorship in Argentina and Chile. Valdés would return to Cuba only if democracy were restored. In the final chapter of *Everyday Everything*, *El exilio sincero* (*The Sincere Exile*, my translation) she summarizes everything: “Besides, life goes on, it cannot be stopped, with or without changes, it is all the same. It doesn’t matter. That’s life – fragments of memories, memorable and happy moments.”<sup>26</sup>

### **Conclusion: Exile, a Choice or Escape and Co-habitation**

The subject of exile harkens to the distant past and persists as an eternal, non-transitory subject in most literary genres. The writers in exile, whether voluntary or forced, have striven to express their personal struggle and anguish through literary expression, looking for both individual and collective salvation.

The novels *Everyday Nothing* and *Everyday Everything* represent a quest for salvation, but are also genuine political documents shaped in narrative writing. In both, Valdés uses similar techniques in order to present her ideology, but there are also some major differences. The basis is the same – exile, struggle against Castro’s regime, feminism. The differences are related to the approach and perception, mainly caused by the youth and youthful faith in a better tomorrow somewhere far away, which was featured in the first novel, and the mature perception and disappointment visible in the second novel. According to Valdés, writing these novels was her salvation. It was very difficult for her, with a child and grim future but she gave up everything, as if she had been a metaphor, in order to tell a story of an island that wanted to become a paradise, but became a hell instead. It was terrible when she realized in Paris that exile is an illusion of freedom, a punishment. That is what *Everyday Nothing* and *Everyday*

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 277.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 299.

*Everything* are actually about – escape and punishment, with exile the subject connecting them. Valdés is a strong, shocking and piercing voice of Cuban dissidents. Her work centers on the critical vision of the Cuban present reality, as well as nostalgia for the life that was left there, for everything that is Cuban. She longs for her country, customs, warmth, hometown even despite the fact that it is ruined by time and the lack of resources. On many occasions she implies Europe lacks solidarity, spontaneous behavior, openness. Valdés is considered to be the loudest, bravest and the most direct female voice of Hispano American literature. There is no doubt that she is the most original and distinct female voice that has appeared in Hispanic literature in the last decade. At the end of this circle of two related novels, her mission is clear, return to the Cuban people what they need: freedom, life, historical truth, respect.