A LITTLE LOVE
by C. C. Medina
New York: Warner, 2000 $18.95

This exciting new novel is the work of a Cuban-American academic couple living in Miami, Florida. After twenty-five years of marriage this creative duo have given birth to a very successful literary masterpiece of Latino literature in the United States. The initials “C. C.” stands for Carlos and Carolina, or perhaps Carolina and Carlos, it is hard to tell. Carlos teaches Spanish at a local school and Carolina (also know as Carolina Hospital, poet and the author of several literary Cuban-American anthologies) teaches English at a local college. In talking to them in person, they described their method of literary collaboration as that of sitting together in front of a single lap top computer with one or the other just typing away. However hard this might be to comprehend, the simple fact is that it works—two minds somehow become one.

The novel deals with four friends, four successful Latina women living in multicultural Miami, searching for love. Isabel is a chemical engineer who has remained celibate since her divorce, four years ago, from her Anglo husband. Isabel lives with her two teenage sons and her parents. Mercy (Mercedes), another main character in the novel, is Isabel’s younger cousin and a lucrative real estate representative. Mercy is single and “living la vida loca” in South Beach. Her mother’s main goal in life is to find her a nice Cuban man to marry; however, Mercy’s string of boyfriends do not seem interested in marriage. Mercy and Isabel are the Cuban-American half of this female quartet. Lucinda is Dominican and a frustrated artist married to a bank president who gave up his artistic talent for his family money. The last main character is Julia, a Mexican-American college professor, who is left behind by her boyfriend when he accepts a more prestigious job in Mexico.

Throughout the novel Julia struggles intellectually and emotionally with her lost love, and after a long painful search, she realizes that she is no longer interested in resuming a relationship with her ex, but instead would like to begin a relationship with a woman she has met. Her sexual border crossing (a topic in the book she is writing) becomes not only an individual choice, but also a public one, and the reader struggles along with Julia and her best friends—Isabel, Mercy, and Lucinda. Curiously, it is Mercy, the most sexually liberated member of the group, that has the most difficulty accepting her friend’s choice. Isabel meets a Cuban-American man who helps her deal with her son’s automobile accident and her mother’s incarceration on her recent visit to Cuba. Mercy marries a Puerto Rican man who makes her happy; however, her mother is not thrilled with the fact that he is not Cuban. Lucinda’s marriage is on shaky ground, due to her husband’s affair, but by the end of the book, the couple is ready to finally give their marriage another try.

The love theme is handled in a realistic and contemporary manner, not in an idealistic romantic
way. In order for these four women and their mates to be able to obtain “a little love” they have to struggle, on a daily basis, with all the stress of living in a large cosmopolitan area in the twenty-first century in the United States. The four women in the novel are intelligent, thoughtful individuals and not stereotypes. While women’s liberation has brought them partially through a new way of life in a new country, the “promised land” is still on the horizon. Men and women must toil in the new playing field in order to find a role that is both fulfilling for the couple and for the individual. The struggles continues ….

The authors of *A Little Love* have announced that their novel has been purchased by Hollywood for a possible future movie. Getting the novel to a bigger public would be positive; however, one wonders if the humor and the beautiful language will survive the shift from paper to big screen. One of the greatest triumphs of this novel is the smoothness in which the authors go from English to Spanish and vice versa. Their translations of the Spanish language into English are not literal, but rather poetic, and the result is a wonderful tapestry of the bilingual mind at work.

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**HAVANA HEAT: A LUPE SOLANO MYSTERY**

by Carolina García-Aguilera

New York: William Morrow, 2000 $24.00

This is Lupe Solano’s fifth outing as a Cuban-American detective fighting crime in Miami, Florida, and it is terrific. The novel is a thrill a minute, accompanied by instructive material on Cuban heritage. Carolina García-Aguilera’s literary creation of a liberated female detective with plenty of style and humor hits the mark once again. We now find Lupe romantically involved with a Cuban-American lawyer whom she met in the previous novel: *A Miracle in Paradise* (1999). Professionally, Lupe has gained a reputation, as of late, as an art expert since she has helped several clients regained stolen works of Cuban art. Because of such a reputation, Lupe is hired simultaneously by two clients in *Havana Heat* to help them with their art related problems. The first investigation has to do with finding a missing art dealer who sold a stolen Cuban painting, and the second, with retrieving a medieval tapestry that an exiled family had to leave hidden in Cuba when they fled the communist island back in 1961. The subject matter lends itself to an investigation of the buying and selling of Cuban art around the world. The Castro government has confiscated many works of art from Cubans who abandoned the island. These works cannot be sold legally, since the Castro government is not the legal rightful owner, but illegal sales are quite common. After the fall of the Soviet Union, the Cuban government has tried to obtain money by selling most of the masterpieces of Cuban art owned by Cuban museums and thus significantly reducing the country’s art patrimony. Lupe’s investigation also shows that the Cuban government has notably benefited financially, not only by selling the artistic heritage of the nation but also by selling fake works of art.

In some ways, *Havana Heat* is similar to the first novel of the series: *Bloody Waters*, where Lupe has to infiltrate herself into Cuba in order to bring back the mother of an adopted Cuban-American little girl dying of leukemia. Previously, Lupe returned to a Cuban fishing village. This time she returns to Havana to unearth the medieval tapestry brought to Cuba by
Christopher Columbus on one of his latest voyages. Lupe is accompanied, on both illegal trips, by Barbara Pérez, an eccentric Afro-Cuban boat captain. In Cuba, Lupe painfully describes an apocalyptic Havana. Castro’s transformation of the pearl of the Caribbean into a ghost of its former self is indeed traumatic, like going back in time to the nineteenth century. Lupe has inside help with this job from a female art restorer, who also has her own agenda, which is revealed in the novel. Lupe succeeds in Cuba, but not without first running into the missing art dealer from Miami who has been trailing her. Lupe, although diminutive in size, has enough experience to get the upper hand when the art dealer is distracted by Lupe’s companion.

Lupe Solano returns exhausted to Miami, but in a few days, with the help of lawyers, art experts, and the Cuban art restorer, she is able to settle all the mystery in a fair manner. Lupe Solano, like many other feminist detectives, does not always solve the enigmatic cases in a way that is satisfactory for her clients, Lupe’s ethical concerns are above those of some of her clients because the most important thing for this detective is not necessarily to regain the status quo, but instead to find the best ethical solution for all.

In Havana Heat, as in her other novels, Carolina García-Aguilera has so many interesting issues going on at the same time that even after reading about the plot, the reader will find sufficient excitement to keep reading until the very last page, without being able to put the book down and, without realizing it, learn a great deal about Cuban master painters, and the current political situation of this communist island ninety miles away from Key West, Florida.

MI MOTO FIDEL: MOTORCYCLING THROUGH CASTRO’S CUBA
by Christopher P. Baker
Washington: National Geographic Adventure Press, 2001 $26.00

Mi Moto Fidel: Motorcycling Through Castro’s Cuba combines two popular features of travel books within one tome, in this case the combination includes an exotic destination: Cuba, the forbidden island, and an unusual mode of transportation: a motorcycle. Motorcycle transportation in travel literature reached a high philosophical plateau with the publication of Robert M. Persig’s Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance, a life manual for the seventies, and more recently another good motorcycle journey was published, although less lofty: Investment Biker: On the Road with Jim Rogers (1994). This is another life manual, but this time for older and richer individuals trying to learn more about the international financial market by traveling around the world on a motorcycle. The Cuba travel book genre has had several worthy samples during the nineties, some of the most popular have been: Tom Miller’s Trading with the Enemy: A Yankee Travels Through Castro’s Cuba (1992), Christopher Hunt’s Waiting for Fidel (1998), and most recently Andrei Codrescu’s Ay Cuba!: A Socio-Erotic Journey (1999).

Christopher Baker’s book, Mi Moto Fidel is more successful than the three travels books previously mentioned because of the motorcycle that he was able to bring to and use in Cuba. Baker’s motorcycle allows him to travel by himself with much less restriction than prior visitors who had to make travel arrangements through the government. Christopher Baker is a British travel-guide-writer living in California, a confessed leftist, and a bon-vivant. His experience in
Cuba changes his mind about Fidel Castro’s forty year experiment with communism in the Caribbean island.

When I started this journey, I was a Castrophile with a soft spot for the Revolution. …I made a halfhearted stab at defending Castro’s achievements in culture, education, and health.

“You don’t understand, Cristóbal,” replied Pedro. “It is easy to be a socialist when you live in the United States. You can believe in the dreams without having to exist in this nightmare.” (275)

Baker’s book title is a play on words, since the name Fidel means faithful, the title alludes to the hero of the book, not Fidel Castro, but Baker’s faithful motorcycle, his 1,000cc Paris-Dakar BMW that he smuggles into Cuba from the United States on a small boat bringing in humanitarian aid. Baker even forgets to check the oil in his motorcycle on a regular basis and finds his worthy steed bone dry not once, but twice, and yet the BMW gives him no trouble. Baker does run into difficulties, however, with the military who start following him at the halfway mark on his seven thousand mile trek through Cuba. From that point on Baker fears for the notes that he has compiled based on conversations with average, everyday Cubans. He fears not only for the possible loss of his manuscript, but also for the Cubans he has interviewed.

Christopher Baker’s motorcycle journey through Cuba in 1996, along with other shorter stays on the island, has given him enough material to write not only this book, but also a guidebook on Cuba. This book will please not only armchair travelers, but many motorcycle enthusiasts as well. His observation and insight into Castro’s Cuba is intriguing and thought provoking.

Biographical Sketch

Henry Pérez, Professor of Spanish, is a native of Cuba. He received his M.A. and Ph.D. from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, where he specialized in Contemporary Literature from Spain and Latin American. He graduated from the University of Massachusetts at Boston with a double major in Spanish and English. Dr. Pérez was the former Chair of the Department of Modern Languages at Manchester College in Indiana.