

Three Book Reviews by Henry Pérez, Ph.D.

Professor of Spanish

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.

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 regain 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