

**Book Review: *Loving Che*  
Ana Menéndez**

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I must confess that, as a Cuban exile, I would not be a likely reader for a novel with such a contradictory title as this one. There is nothing to love about the communist Argentinean physician who helped Fidel Castro overthrow the government of Fulgencio Batista back in 1959. Ernesto “Che” Guevarra, whose photograph adorns millions of tee shirts and other objects around the world, was more popular outside of Cuba, as the prince of guerilla warfare, than on the island itself. In Cuba he was more of a frightening and foreign figure, even with those on Castro’s side. After his death in Bolivia in 1967, where he attempted to spread the Cuban Revolution throughout Latin America, the image of this rebel is still carried by the young – ironically, spread all over the world by bourgeoisie merchandising companies that he eventually would have destroyed.

The reason that I purchased this book was that I was familiar with the author. I had listened to Ana Menéndez read from her previous work, a collection of short stories: *In Cuba I was a German Sheperd*. At that reading, in Books and Books, a famous bookstore in Coral Gables, Florida, some years ago, she mentioned, in passing, that she was working on a new novel. Despite the title, I bought the novel. And the risk was worth it. *Loving Che* is an intricate labyrinth of realities.

One reality concerns a daughter who lives in Miami and the memories, or lack of them, of a missing mother back in Cuba who sent her daughter into exile as a baby with her grandfather. Another reality is that of her mother who reappears in the form of a mysterious manuscript that has been left at the daughter’s door—a set of letters that describe her mother’s story since they separated. This orphaned adult attempts to find her mother during several unsuccessful trips to the communist island. The reality of the memories of her mother’s life growing up in Havana before and after Castro comes into question after failed attempts to verify the facts of the manuscript. The reader sees the mother growing up in Havana before the Cuban Revolution—an odd child who does not behave like her sisters do, and who later on becomes a painter. She does not attend school until quite late in life and likes to walk throughout the city all by herself. As a teenager she develops crushes on political rebels who routinely end up getting killed. Later on she marries an older man who dabbles in linguistics and writes on the topic of language. According to the manuscript, her husband introduces her to “Che” Guevara, and they end up having an adulterous affair that lasts until “Che” meets his fateful destiny in Bolivia.

The search for her mother parallels the search to find out whether “Che” is indeed her father or not, as the diary suggests. However, the search proves difficult since the diary seems to give false clues. The reader, just like the daughter, ends up with unanswered questions: was the diary reality, fiction, or a mixture of both?

In between the interesting layers of reality in *Loving Che*, the reader is also exposed to exquisite poetic language throughout the novel. *Loving Che*, in spite of its paradoxical political title, is quite satisfying to the senses and a great example of a novel in this postmodern era.

### **Biography**

Henry Pérez, a native of Cuba, graduated from the University of Massachusetts at Boston with a double major in English and Spanish. He received his doctorate in Spanish & Latin American Literature from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. Dr. Pérez is the former chair of the Department of Modern Languages at Manchester College in Indiana. He has taught at Henderson since 1991.