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**Che Guevara, Nostalgia, Photography, Felt History and
Narrative Discourse in Ana Menéndez's *Loving Che***

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Hipertexto

At the risk of seeming ridiculous, let me say that the true revolutionary is guided by a great feeling of love. It is impossible to think of a genuine revolutionary lacking this quality.

Che Guevara

More and more I've come to understand that when we mourn what a place used to be, we are also mourning what we used to be.

Ana Menéndez

Many of the discussions and debates of the Cuban Revolution in Miami, Havana and elsewhere converge, merge and diverge in the person and persona of Che Guevara. This process produces a mesmerizing mixture of myth, reality, and nonsense which we are far from unscrambling: "There's just this fascination people have with the man - which is not of the man, but of the photograph," says Ana Menéndez, author of "Loving Che" (<http://www.csmonitor.com/2004/0305/p13s02-algn.html>). The photograph in question is Alberto Korda's famous picture of Che Guevara taken on March 5, 1960 at a Cuban funeral service for victims of the La Coubre explosion. The photographic reality of Che soon transformed itself into an iconic image which traveled around the world. Che's image has since undergone myriad changes and has become a pop culture, fashionista icon and capitalist commodity marketed and sold all over the world, including Cuba.

Nostalgia and memory occupy the interstitial space between Che Guevara's personal and revolutionary life and his now simulacralized iconicity: "Part of Guevara's appeal is that his revolutionary ideals no longer pose much of a threat in the post-cold-war world. Thirty years have tamed the anti-imperialist tiger and turned him into a rebel without claws"

(<http://www.geocities.com/Hollywood/8702/chechic.html>). Che's early death also played a key role: "Every feature of that death contributed to its transcending the tragic but after all common occurrence that befalls everyone; it gave birth to a myth that would endure through the end of the century. Che Guevara is a cultural icon today largely because the era he typified left cultural tracks much more than political ones" (*Compañero*, 391, 409). His tragic death notwithstanding, the photographic transformation commenced with his death and helicopter ride to La Higuera, Bolivia where a nurse washed him, combed his hair and trimmed his beard: "The Christ like image prevailed; the other, ravaged and somber, vanished. Ernesto Guevara came to inhabit the social utopias and dreams of an entire generation thought an almost mystical affinity with his era" (xiv).

Ana Menéndez's novel occupies a dialogic space where the multiple Che Guevara discourses swirl around this highly public yet profoundly enigmatic figure. Menéndez's novel brings into conflict two concepts of history: "Felt history must be distinguished from official history with its attention to leaders, its overview of events, or its analysis of underlying trends. And it should also be distinguished from emotions or feelings, since history's psychological effects are usually less dramatic and revealing than its immediate feel, its physical impact on the body and the senses. In essence, then, felt history refers to the eloquent gestures and images with which a character or lyric persona registers the direct pressure of events, whether enlarging and buoyant or limiting and harsh" (*Magical Realism*, 273). Nostalgia aligns itself much more closely with felt history in that both are transemotive, transhistorical and transtemporal.¹

Ana Menéndez, being a journalist and fiction writer, shows the struggle between official history and felt in her novel: "He has become—he is already a fictional character, in a sense. He has become this image that we layer with our own meaning according to what we wish. And there is very little of the man left, for that reason. Go to Cuba now—I was there recently in the Hotel Nacional, in the souvenir shop, and it was all Che. Che key chains, Che pens, Che T-shirts. Now he is a commodity."

¹ "Nostalgia, in fact, may depend precisely on the *irrecoverable* nature of the past for its emotional impact and appeal. It is the very pastness of the past, its inaccessibility, that likely accounts for a large part of nostalgia's power—for both conservatives and radicals alike. This is rarely the past as actually experienced, of course; it is the past as imagined, as idealized through memory and desire. In this sense, however, nostalgia is less about the past than about the present. It operates through what Mikhail Bakhtin called an 'historical inversion': the ideal that is *not* being lived now is projected into the past. It is 'memorialized' as past, crystallized into precious moments selected by memory, but also by forgetting, and by desire's distortions and reorganizations. Simultaneously distancing and proximating, nostalgia exiles us from the present as it brings the imagined past near. The simple, pure, ordered, easy, beautiful, or harmonious past is constructed (and then experienced emotionally) in conjunction with the present—which, in turn, is constructed as complicated, contaminated, anarchic, difficult, ugly, and confrontational" (<http://www.library.utoronto.ca/utel/criticism/hutchinp.html>).

http://www.themorningnews.org/archives/personalities/birnbaum_v_ana_Menéndez.php).

Paratextual Thresholds

The title *Loving Che* mirrors the structure of the book's triadic structure: Void-Plenitude-Void. Pages 1-12 constitute a void in which the unnamed narrator wanders from place to place; 13-156 narrate the story of Teresa in Cuba and her love affair with Che; and 157-228 recount the narrator's attempts to find her mother through repeated journeys to Cuba. Given the number of pages devoted to each section, the fact that the first person narrator remains unnamed in spite of remaining close to the experiences, the overlapping of the two story levels, and that the title of the novel is also the name of the letters/diary; all these factors contribute to an imbricated first/second diegesis. The ontological discontinuity stems from the unnamed narrator's search for her past and her identity and Teresa's obsession and passion for Che. In other words, the ontological rift takes place between *felt* history (Teresa) and official history composed of articles the narrator writes about the places she has visited without inserting herself: "I even came to believe that this was a more honest way to work, capturing the purity of place without the complication that human beings tend to introduce" (*Loving Che*, 10-11).

The photographs on the front and back covers of the novel parallel the voids left at the beginning and end of the title. The front cover photo, nestled in a woman's hands, is encased in an antique frame which clashes with the defiant visage of Che peering into the distance. The back cover presents a compressed image of Che as if we were looking at his mirror image. This iconic image of Che is also blurred, and it initiates the process of deiconization of one of the most ubiquitous images of the 20th-century. The front and back covers intertextualize with the novel from the first page: "Whenever I travel, I like to spend the last day of my journey in the old part of town, lingering for hours in junk stores whose dusty shelves, no matter where in the world they may be, always seem to be piled high with old magazines and books and yellowed photographs" (1). The unnamed narrator likes "excavating into other people's memories" and the "photographs of strangers, especially, have always brought me a gentle peace, and over the years I have amassed a large collection of serious and formal-looking people caught in the camera's moment" (1). These sentences correspond to the front cover while the back cover relates to the last sentence of page one: "But I know that I'm playing a game with history. For all my imaginings, these images will remain individual mysteries, numbed and forever silenced by the years between us" (1).

Photographic Discourse

One day the unnamed narrator receives a package from Spain containing letters and photographs that belonged to her mother, Teresa. There is no return address. The papers and photographs "that spilled out smelled of dark drawers and dusty rooms" (12). The narrator then proceeds to arrange the letters and

photos. The first photograph (13) shows a group of silhouetted people looking at an apparently endless series of the iconic image of Che below a fragment of a Neruda poem which reflects the problematic nature of Che Guevara's legacy:

*Falsos me parecieron mis primeros esfuerzos.
Y ahora solo quedan estas rajadas de memoria,
escritas sobre banderas de viento.... (13).²*

Like the strands of memory, Che's image is inscribed on flags of wind which divide into aleatory, disconnected fragments no longer held by the photographic frame. Che's life, his historical and personal truth, and his iconicity have now entered the zone of postmodern truth claims. The flamboyant discourse of revolution of the 60s gives way to the discourses of popular culture and commoditization.

The second photo of Che (51) shows him standing in a jeep addressing the crowd after the triumph of the revolution. Teresa, the present/retrospective narrator, brings the immediacy of felt history to the seminal event: "After the triumph...I don't know if I can describe to you the feeling of that time---it was the strange and dreadful excitement of a world turning, of everything staid and ordinary being swept away. The future rode a chariot and the people pressed together to watch it pass. We were all so happy then. And those palms, eternal witness to the blowing winds. Oh Cuba my beautiful land!" (50). Text and photograph merge and transcend official history. Teresa links felt history to a painterly discourse which first displaces and then replaces official history. Consequently, image and text establish a meaningful, dialogic relationship: "Cataclysmic events, whatever their outcome, are as rare as a great love. Bombings, revolutions, earthquakes, hurricanes---anyone who has passed through one and lived, if they are honest, will tell you that even in the depths of their fear there was an exhilaration such as had been missing from their lives until then" (51-2). Teresa's painterly vision and personal involvement in the Revolution enable her to dialogize text and image and endow it with new meaning.

The next three black and white photographs (55, 83 and 87) successively depict Che as a man of the people, a charismatic leader and the voice of

² The photographs discussed in this article come from the following sources:

p. 13: 1968, "Cuban artist's installation" © Fred Mayer / MAGNUM PHOTOS

p. 50: 1958, "National tribute to Che Guevara" © CORBIS SYGMA

p. 55: 1958, "National tribute to Che Guevara" © CORBIS SYGMA

p. 83: 1958, "National tribute to Che Guevara" © CORBIS SYGMA

p. 87: "Ernesto Che Guevara" © CORBIS SYGMA

p. 100: 1960 "Ernesto Che Guevara" © Andrew Saint-George / MAGNUM PHOTOS

p. 123: "Ernesto Che Guevara" © CORBIS SYGMA

p. 126: 1967, "Ernesto Che Guevara's body" © Hulton-Deutsch Collection / CORBIS

p. 156: "1963 Ernesto Che Guevara" © Rene Burri / MAGNUM PHOTOS

p. 226: "Ernesto Che Guevara" © CORBIS SYGMA

Page 155 is a photo supplied from the author, Ana Menendez. Page 218 is a sketch done by the author.

revolution. These photos were taken with an old camera which imbues them with certain qualities.³ Che Guevara saw the revolution in black and white, and the gray areas never entered his mind when he tried to replicate the Cuban Revolution in Africa and Bolivia. The triumph of the Cuban Revolution became his black and white photographic model, his permanent mindset.

The first photo shows Che's arm in a cast accompanied by another man. Teresa imbues the photo with vision and meaning: "There he stands at the front door, his arm still in a cast. Walking through the door ahead of the others, his hair greasy, his uniform dirty, walking, his eyes ablaze" (55). She then infuses the photo with felt history: "The revolutionary recoils slightly and our eyes meet very briefly. Much later, I will see this as the moment that we reach a private understanding with one another" (56). The purpose of the individual images in the novel is to remove Che from official history and restore him to felt history, to the dialogical voices which envelop him.

The next photo juxtaposes Che the revolutionary leader and the Teresa's incantational prose: "The entire world bends down to touch me—the stars and the invisible clouds and the limbs of the trees all draw closer and closer. Soon dawn will come, dusting with pink the tops of the cathedral, polishing the capitol dome" (82). Her bond with Che flows from felt history: "This photo I've given you—look at it. The camera has caught him mid-sentence, his shirt half-buttoned, leaning forward. He is both reduced and inflated on the page. A grand enough person to have his photo taken. And yet his face is flattened, frozen, his eyes dead in the camera" (83). The third photo shows Che attending a conference and seated before several microphones. The words of the distinctive Argentine voice reach out to her from the photo: "I stand for a long time by the radio, again with the sense that the radio voice is hollowing a tunnel in the day for me, everything bending close" (87).

Voice and image merge in the next photo (100) which shows Che lying across a bed, bare-chested, drinking mate: "He opens his eyes and watches me, propped on one elbow. I move to kiss him, part his lips with my tongue. He murmurs, moves his hand down my spine, down. I let myself sink onto him. He looks up at me; My love, he murmurs. The light is beginning to fade from a window that now catches our reflection between its blinds. I am above him, watching him, this man who is not a hero or a photograph" (100-01). She succeeds in interfacing with Che in the photo and felt history bridges the gap between official history and the meaningless surface of the technical image: "He closes his eyes and draws me close, a great catch in his throat like a day's dying

³ "Black/white situations cannot be found in the world 'out there'-- because black-and-white are limits, are 'ideal situations.' Since black and white situations are theoretical, they cannot be found in the manifest world. Black/white photographs, on the other hand, are found nearly every-where: they are images of concepts contained in a theory of optics, and they owe their origin to such a theory. Black-and-white does not exist in the world 'out there.' The drawback, obviously, is that such a world would not result in color, but in gray. Gray is the color of theory; after having theoretically analysed the world, it is impossible to re-synthesize it. Black/white photographs display this fact: they are gray; they are images of theories"

(<http://korotonomedya2.googlepages.com/VilemFlusser-TowardsAPhilosophyofPho.pdf>, 17).

into night. When he speaks again, it is with a voice that comes from worlds away” (101).

Her last visual contact with Ernesto is a photo of Che Guevara dressed as a businessman before his secret mission to Bolivia (123). Che was able to fool many people with his disguise, but Teresa’s painterly vision and transhistorical emotional bond enable her to recognize him immediately: “You cannot fool a lover; a lover has mapped every contour, learned every hidden passage. A man cannot hide himself from a lover any more that he can hide from his own face” (123). The last photo of Che (126) shows his face in death, and Teresa extracts meaning from it by painting a picture of this photographed, simulacralized and commoditized revolutionary: “The beauty of this life yet held him—the bird that passed overhead, the sky and its clouds, the slope of the valley and the trees that clung to the side of the hills and, yes, even the animals that tore at one another beneath the boughs, the violent bleedings: the sorrows and the joys. Oh my Captain, my sweet Ernesto. And where the bed of flowers? Where the red banners? Gone away into silence, never to taste excellent morning again. Gone away to memory’s tomb. Down, down, down into the dumb corridor of the saints. Oh, but in the beginning how wide the sky had seemed, how infinite the horizon where we thought to rest our eyes for a season” (125-27).

Two more photos show Teresa’s baby daughter and Che who appears to be looking at her in an almost innocent manner, as if he saw himself reincarnated in her. Che’s journey and Teresa’s love for him have come full circle: “Already, I read him in every move of your hands, smelled him on your sweet baby’s breath. When you cried at night, I lay remembering the lost afternoons, how time had wrapped its eternity around us” (154). Felt history has allowed Teresa to desacralize and decommo-ditize Che and restore him not to his photographic reality but to the status of a traditional image imbued with symbolic meaning: “You and I are past forgiveness or understanding. I took a history from you and you returned carrying his memory in your dark eyes. I leave you our failures together and also the private triumph of your own life, the beating in your chest of a love that endures. Farewell” (155). The word “Farewell” stands by itself followed by the baby picture and on the next page, Teresa writes the last line of her diary followed by the picture of Che: “Farewell but you will be with me” (156). The “you” expresses the final fusion of Teresa, Che and the baby in whom the three lives converge and merge until all the contradictions cease: “And then one day you appeared. Beneath my window, singing for me the poem that so many years ago your father had sung for me. You appeared like a vision” (155).

The last three photos take place in the conflictive space of the technical image and writing. The first one (163) is a photo of the store windows of El Encanto department store in Cuba: “These last I printed out on special paper and framed. Sometimes I like to imagine Teresa standing there, just beyond the photograph’s blind edge” (163). While the narrator’s search for the real Che in the realm of secondary orality and written history, she still imagines Teresa (and, by extension, Che) located in an interstitial space between image and writing. The last two photos of Che inject a fundamental ambivalence already present in Teresa’s diary because according to the testimony of an old woman who knew

Teresa, she “loved Che very much, yes, as we all did. But only from a distance. Many people loved him, men and women. Many people. But your mother never knew him. She would have told me. You must understand this” (212). Teresa herself had decided to embark on the chirographic and pictorial paths to transmit her story, which created a conflict between image and text. Her diary and her repeated paintings of Che occupied her fully: “[She] began to paint portraits of El Che almost exclusively. She spent hours erasing and drawing, layering colors” (216). These paintings start to be sold by the old woman’s daughter and the process of commoditization starts: “A few months ago, my daughter began to take the paintings of El Che down to the plaza, where the booksellers gather. She sold the first one to a German man for fifty dollars. So the next time, my daughter went down with a painting and asked for one hundred dollars. This too sold. She sells them now for two hundred dollars, and the tourists buy them” (216-17).

Che is now a souvenir. Teresa’s paintings of Che have sold so rapidly that all the unnamed narrator can buy is a half-portrait of Che’s face in pencil and charcoal (218). The last image of Che (226), which she finds in a store in Paris, introduces a profound ambiguity because it shows Che holding a camera: “And to come upon this photo now, so far from home. Surely I walked with ghosts. There he stands for all eternity, the young soldier with a yearning to record the world that lies before him, his hands light on the camera, his eyes searching ahead” (226-27). The novel concludes in the interstitial zone between writing and image: “And when I was done, I lay across the top the tightly wrapped photograph of a man standing alone with his camera, the future not yet a darkened plate; a beautiful stranger who, in a different dream, might have been the father of my heart” (228).

The discourses of photography, narrative, official history, felt history, reality and nostalgia converge, merge and diverge within the protractible/contractible dialogical space/frame of Che’s photo on the front and back of the novel. This idea is bolstered by the first and last photos in the novel, the first showing a succession of the same iconic Che image, and the last showing Che holding a camera. While one could construe these two images as parody and/or metaparody in which Che himself produces iconic images to guarantee his posthumous posterity, it is more likely that this photographic repetition relates to nostalgia and felt history: “Nostalgia is the repetition that mourns the inauthenticity of all repetition and denies the repetition’s capacity to form identity. Thus we find that the disjunctions of temporality traced here create the space for nostalgia’s eruption. Memory, at once impoverished and enriched, presents itself as a device for measurement, the ‘ruler’ of narrative” (*On Longing*, 23-4). The photographic repetition also constitutes a *mise-en-abyme* of the novel itself in which a story within a story disrupts the logic of narrative hierarchy.

Narrative Discourse

Loving Che, whose title and cover photo propose official and felt history, narrative and photographic discourses, reality and nostalgia in kernelized form, suggest the presence of a field of possibilities which cast side shadows across

the text. To the left of the title lies the space of nostalgia, felt history and photographic discourse (the ontological realm) and to the right the space of reality, official history and narrative discourse (the epistemological domain).

The narrator engages in the nostalgic practice of constructing an imagistic record of Cuban exiles: "Some years ago, I became interested in the photographs that exiles had taken out of Cuba. It was common, I found, to frame the photos or place them in albums, to be taken out now and again in the company of friends. I thought I would construct a traveling exhibition of these photographs, and was even able to secure funding for the project. (*Loving Che*, 2). When she discovers that many families will not part with their photos even for a few days, she concludes that "this endless pining for the past seemed to me a kind of madness; everyone living in asylum, exiled from the living, and no one daring to say it plainly" (2).

The narrator in the present reevaluates her former opinion: "I wonder now if this backward looking of the exile could be an antidote to a new and more terrible kind of madness. The exile, whatever the circumstances of his leaving, may wake up one night, as a traveler in an unfamiliar room, and wonder where it is he may set down his feet, in what direction lies the door by which he entered. Perhaps this trauma of separation---being from our very birth---is the normal sequence of things and to detach oneself, to learn to move freely about the world without longings or inventions, takes years of patient learning; and even then we may turn one day and find the years hollowing a dark canyon beneath us" (2-3). She collects photos of *others'* exile experience as a way to compensate for the void of her own past.

The narrator cannot experience loss like other exiles because her past resembles the "years hollowing a dark canyon beneath her" and she cannot fill the void, no matter how many photos she acquires. She finds herself impaled on the axis where text and image merge and diverge, and she is relentlessly pulled along by the linearity of time, unable to return to the past or venture confidently into the future: "Of my origins, I know little. I was raised by my grandfather in a western suburb of Miami in a small house that was almost indistinguishable from the other houses on the street. As a girl I had already begun to sense a void behind me, and as I grew older I became more and more preoccupied with the blank space where my mother should have been" (3-4). The narrator lacks an identity and a name. Like many Cubans in the United States, she cannot live on the hyphen, in the interstitial blank space which constitutes a dystopia, vacillating between exilic and "insilic" poles. She has been living in a state of suspended animation, an eternal present in which she cannot remember the past nor envision the future. As a result, her life has been spiraling inward until she will reach a point of total inertia and lassitude: "For some years, I had been aware in myself of a strange detachment, an aimlessness, I could sit for hours and do nothing, feel nothing" (7).

The narrator cannot resist the power of nostalgia: "The shadows lengthened and then spread. I became aware gradually of music coming from the shortwave, and I recognized the sad voice of Toña la Negra. When the song was

over, another came on, and then another, all of them carried on a whisper. Now I heard every small rustle in the grass, every labored ant-step” (7). Music is foregrounded because the verbal exchanges between the narrator and her grandfather lack quotation marks and thus are assimilated to the musical score which is unfolding within the narrator: “My grandfather and I sat. In the silence, a far-off cricket sang, followed by the sound of the breeze rolling like a fire” (7). Since sound comes from all directions, the music envelops her and then seeps into her mind and heart to fill the void. The dominant verbal media composed of the conversation remains undifferentiated and recedes into the background as the non-dominant media, music, foregrounds itself and materializes her mother’s note whose words resemble the lyrics of a song:

*Farewell, but you will always be
with me, you will go within
a drop of blood circulating in my veins* (9)

Soon after that the narrator drops out of college and starts to travel. Her peregrinations all lead back to her real destination: Cuba. When her grandfather dies, the last barrier is removed and she can no longer hide: “The house was filled with a new silence that seemed to muffle even my attempt to mourn. Shortly after, I made my first trip to Cuba. When I landed and saw the capital by the red light of sunset, I knew I had returned to find my mother” (10). All her attempts to find her mother come to naught, and she finally concludes that “Havana, so lovely at first glance, was really a city of dashed hopes, and everywhere I walked I was reminded that all in life tends to decay and destruction” (10). One day she receives a tightly wrapped box from Madrid with no return address. The box contains the essence of her mother: “I hoped, at first, that by arranging the notes and recollections in some sort of order, I might be able to make sense of them. But on each rereading I found myself drawn deeper and deeper, until I feared I might lose myself among the pages, might drown in a drop of my own blood” (12).

Her blood commingles with that of her mother, and she is swept along by a lyrical discourse. She feels, hears, reads and sees her mother to the point that she “becomes” her mother once she reorganizes Teresa’s diary according to felt history. The fusion of mother-daughter takes place in the musicalized, transtemporal and transhistorical context of felt history: “She was young and slender, and I can say that she reminded me of myself at the same age. She told me her name and said she was looking for a woman who had given up her baby daughter years before.” (14). The woman refuses to let her in, and she watches her until she “could no longer make out her figure in the dark” (15). In two short scenes that end this diary entry, Teresa writes that “that night, the old wind blew and the windows rattled” and “I remembered another night when the wind sang with ghosts. He lay beside me in the dark, listening. Memory, he’d said, is a way of reviving the past, the dead” (15).

Nostalgia constitutes the mediator between the past and future, between the eloquent gestures and images and the constellation of feelings associated with them in the domain of felt history. Teresa’s diary contravenes generic boundaries

by creating an interstitial space of ambivalence regarding her situation, Che Guevara and Cuba. More importantly, Teresa's narrative voice stands in stark contrast to the anonymous, value-neutral, omniscient Narrator-as-Nobody of official history. Cuban history, the Cuban Revolution, Fidel Castro and the overarching image of the Revolutionary Che Guevara are backgrounded while Teresa's diary constantly foregrounds her personal felt history of this dramatic period. At the top of each entry is a black, open fan whose shape usually associates it with imagination, change and femininity (Cirlot, 102). The music of Lecuona, a famous Cuban music composer, constitutes a covert or indirect intermediality which, although covered by the dominant verbal media, surreptitiously works itself into Teresa's soul: "Against the wishes of my mother, I go to the hotel to hear the old mulatto play Lecuona because he always makes me cry." (*Loving Che*, 24).

The diary resembles a collage of ostensibly disconnected moments. The shape of the open fan symbolizes the new moment which unfolds before our eyes. The following entry centers on secondary orality in the form of a radio broadcast by the famous announcer and political critic Eddy Chibás who, after his last radio broadcast on August 5, 1951, committed suicide hoping that his audience would hear the shot: "Eddy Chibás, unlucky Eddy who even now rests under an unlucky sign, is the first man I love" (33). She wants to go on hearing his voice forever because "it is hungry; it comes from beneath deep waters. I want to know him only by the way he says, Honor, honor, honor" (33).

As the decade of the 50s wears on, the revolutionary winds of change blow more strongly until one day Teresa realizes the sudden change wrought by a few men and which she experiences as felt history: "And then the bullets, tearing into time, opening the day into another day, letting me see the other side of things. As a girl, I had thought only love could change us so completely" (45). Teresa's view of time is a chronotopic, or bifocal, with a lens for close-up work and an optic for seeing in the distance (*Dialogism*, 113): "When I think of my past now, it seems so far away, like India or the moon, farther almost than my future seemed to me then. And yet, when I turn my life, like a crystal, it shrinks in my hands. It fits in the space of a fist" (*Loving Che*, 47).

Teresa impeaches official history: "Be vigilant, my daughter; memory is the first storyteller. Anyone can simulate history, it's easy enough---there are classes of people, politicians and writers in particular, who have made it their calling" (47). The open fan shape before each diary entry also serves as a *mise-en-abyme* of scraps of memory gathered up in Teresa's diary: "These scraps of memory that become untethered from the rest, flapping disconsolately in the wind, these memories are the most important of all. Memories like these remind us that life is also loose ends, small events that have no bearing on the story we come to write of ourselves. I have labored to construct a good history for you, to put down the details of your life smoothly; to connect events one to another. But my first efforts seemed false. And I am left with only these small shards of remembrances written on banners of wind" (48-9). Teresa's diary represents

souvenirs/memories of individual experience whose intrinsic value cannot be purchased. Her diary entries/memories/souvenirs constitute m(e)mentos of felt history. Each entry “fans out,” expressing an emotion or creating an image in response to the direct pressure of events which, in this case, is the Cuban Revolution. Her diary “opens” a second time with a huge ellipsis: “After the triumph...” (50). Everything relating to *before* and *during* the Cuban Revolution is omitted while the shards of Teresa’s memory take momentary but center stage in a series of fleeting instances. She permits the photograph to synthesize and compress the revolutionary history so that she can assimilate it to felt history.

Teresa’s relationship with Che radically changes everything: “A kiss. The first parting of flesh. Everything that comes later is sweet elaboration. The first kiss is more intimate than the naked bed; its small perimeter already contains the first submission and the final betrayal” (91). From this moment on felt history will dominate Teresa’s every perception: “Sweet sweet savagery. Time dismantles in our handles. I sleep and wake to his mouth. And then the sharp breath of knowing. He has entered my life to stay, burrowed deep into my lungs so that every gasp will bring me back to today: the pale desert settling its eternity into the far grooves of the earth, without end or design” (97). The last two images of Che show him disguised as businessman and then his visage in death. Teresa always refers to him as Ernesto and their separation cannot diminish their love: “Oh, but in the beginning how wide the sky had seemed, how infinite the horizon where we thought to rest our eyes for a season” (127).

The next section of the diary starts with another ellipsis: “In the beginning...” (128). This section of the diary records the felt history of their love: “Even after all these years, I remember everything with a supernatural precision, with a certainty that is not given to actual life” (130). He embodies felt history in all its purity and ephemerality: “Loving Che was like palest sea foam, like wind through the stars” (138). It is the only time that Teresa uses Che instead of Ernesto, and this repetition of the title reverberates down the long hallway of endless recreations of this transparent yet profoundly enigmatic figure: “Savior, murderer, brutal love of my own creation” (138). He defines himself as a chronotope of the road, seen close up and from afar, but always in motion, a series of moments captured by mechanical, sensorial or other means: “I’m not going to lie to you, sweet Teresa, he says. My vocation is to roam the highways and waterways of the world forever, always curious, investigating everything, sniffing into nooks and crannies, but always detached, not putting down roots anywhere, not staying long enough to discover what lies beneath” (146). When Teresa gives birth, everything points to Che as the father and so the beginning is in the end and the end is in the beginning.

The last part of the novel, entitled “Letter on the Road,” switches back to the unnamed narrator. She first decides to put away the contents of the package: “I pushed the box into a closet, setting it on the highest shelf” (158). Placing it on the highest shelf suggests that either Teresa lies beyond her reach, or that she does not want to delve into the matter anymore or that, in symbolic terms, the box represents the “death” of her unknowable past. Interestingly enough, the

next day she visits her old neighborhood. She parks across the street from her old house, dozes off and awakens to see a little boy walking toward her on the other side of the street: "As he approached the house, he slowed. He stopped at the sidewalk in front of the house. He turned and looked at me. I sat very still. A minute passed, maybe two. Then he took his gaze away and started walking again" (159). This child symbolizes the future and the figure of the mystic child who "solves riddles and teaches wisdom" (*Dictionary of Symbols*, 45). The next day she retrieves Teresa's package from the closet.

The meaning of the name Teresa coincides with the unnamed narrator's quest: "Theresa, or Teresa, is 'one who reaps'. The name implies one who is destined to work hard, but who will receive great bounty for her efforts. The name is associated with the fall season of the earth's life cycle: a time of harvest, of plenty, of purposeful labors, of warmth and generosity. Theresa shares her harvest with the world, as the earth has given its fruits to Theresa, thus respecting and supporting the natural cycle of life" (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Teresa>). The male figures in two women's lives have died or disappeared at some stage. This void is filled by Teresa's oral/verbal presence: "The cadence of [Teresa's] voice began to invade my dreams. Her impossible life began to seem more real to me than my own. And I longed, in spite of the better judgment I had shown at the start, to prove that her words were true" (160).

The narrator then undertakes another "logical" search consulting three different people who might know something useful about the 1960s in Cuba. The first source, Dr. Caravallo, a professor of Cuban history with whom she took some courses, cannot solve the problem. This is because the answer lies in felt history: "It occurred to me that I was experiencing something like the passion that had so gripped Teresa, this unknown woman who more and more I was coming to genuinely think of as a newly discovered part of myself (162). She says that at times she likes "to imagine Teresa standing there, just beyond the photograph's blind edge" (163). The next source, Jacinto Alcazar, a former photographer who fought with Che and Fidel (he now lives in Miami), provides a wealth of information about the revolution, but his language proves insufficient and his "story began to come apart" (165).

Next she visits Ileana, an aficionado of Cuban art, who offers little in the way of practical information. Neither official history, oral history nor art history succeeds in helping the narrator who, upon the suggestion of Ileana, decides to travel legally to Cuba. The narrator not only applies for a visa but she lists her family as "Teresa de la Landre, address unknown." The narrator visits Dr. Caravallo one more time before leaving for Cuba. It proves fruitless because Dr. Caravallo's rejects felt history in which the narrator now dwells: "I cannot agree with your Teresa when she likens history to personal events. The world is much bigger than ourselves, though it is pleasant to think that it might fit in the space of our fist" (173).

Upon arriving in Havana, the narrator undertakes a search which brings her into contact with an assortment of people and dead ends. One day she meets a

young woman whose mother may have worked for the narrator's mother. Although Teresa was called "de la Cueva," the woman says that her mother believes that it is the same woman (205). The narrator learns that Teresa's husband, Calixto or also Carlos, was arrested by the Cuban authorities for something he wrote, that her mother never had an affair with Che, never knew him personally, that her mother had made friends with a Spanish couple, that she had started to write letters to her daughter about a year before, and that she had died alone when the police found her body. Before she died, Teresa had started a series of portraits of Che Guevara and a few months ago the lady's daughter "began to take the paintings of El Che down to the plaza, where the booksellers gather. She sold the first one to a German man for fifty dollars" (216). Then she started selling more paintings for higher prices and Che himself falls victim to the law of supply and demand. The narrator is only able to obtain a half front view of Che's face.

Conclusion

The unnamed narrator accepts the inferred verdict of felt history that implies that El Che belonged to Teresa for a time, that he "belonged" to everyone at some point and that he never belonged to anyone permanently. The sign under which Che lived was the chronotope of the road along which he traveled his whole life with a few stops or layovers, and no final destination. The novel implies that Che had a death wish and that part of his quest was to experience an epiphanized death during a decade of profound change in the whole world: Whether or not *Loving Che* sheds new light on the Ernesto Che Guevara, and his personal life or his relationships with women, the reader is left to decide, but the novel makes a strong case for nostalgia. The narrator's present leaves her ultimately dissatisfied and unfulfilled and as she continues to delve into Teresa's past, she comes to idealize (and perhaps merge with) Teresa's experience. Their relationship (mother and daughter) ultimately displaces the other mother relationship of Che Guevara and the Motherland. The absence of quotation marks in the novel creates a continuous and undifferentiated dialogue about Che Guevara with different voices contending for supremacy in the conflictive space of Che Guevara images. Photography, narrative discourse, images and simulacra of Che have transformed him into an icon, symbol and product and he continues to travel the long and winding road passing through different human, technical and imagistic strata, making stops here and there, and then resume peregrinating towards an unknown destination.

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