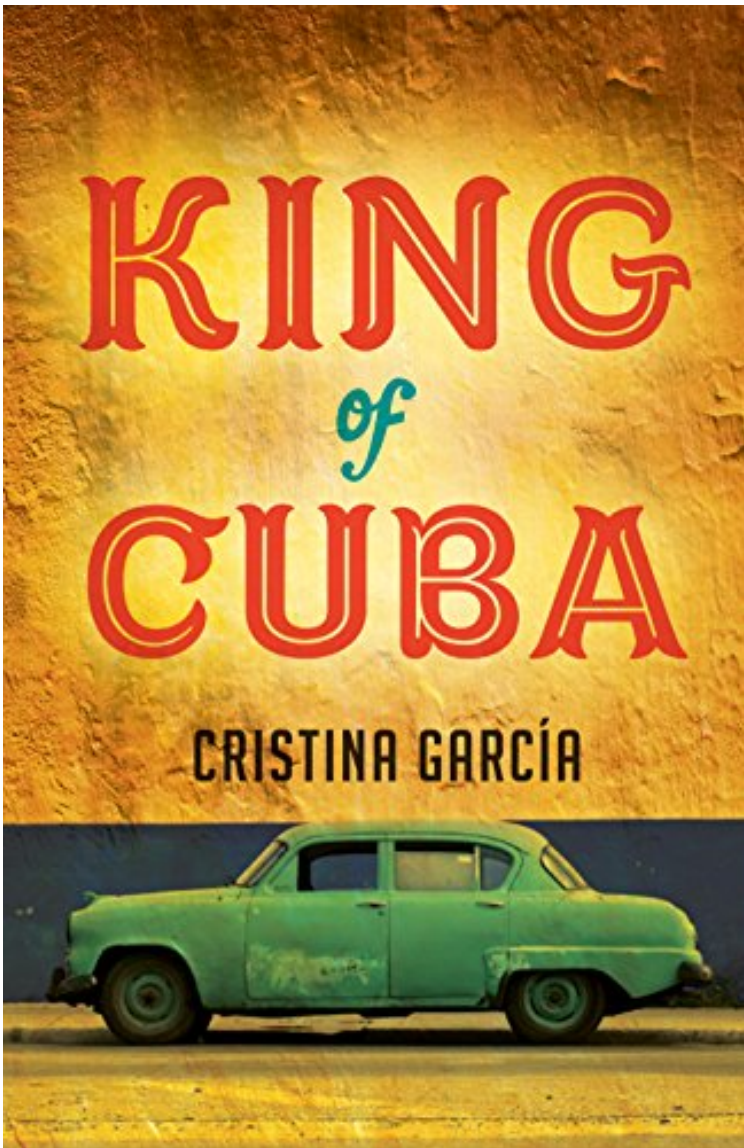


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King of Cuba



Par Cristina Garcia
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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurEl Comandante, an aging Castro-like dictator shambles about his mansion in Havana, visits a dying friend, tortures hunger strikers in one of his prisons, and grapples with the stale end of his life that is as devoid of grandeur as his nearly sixty-year-old revolution. Across the waters in Florida, Goyo Herrera, a Miami exile in his eighties, plots revenge against his longtime enemythe very same El Comandantewhom he blames for stealing his beloved, ruining his homeland, and taking his father's lifeExtraitKing of Cuba 1. By the Sea Havana El Comandante gazed out the window at the stale light of another tropical morning, at the long curve of crumbling seaside buildings. Spindly, sun-sick palms splintered the skies with their spiky fronds. The sea was a rumpled bed of blues. The usual lovebirds tangled

on the malecón, verging on public fornication. He'd passed laws against such displays but it hadn't deterred the couples. The seawall remained theirs, as it had for generations of lovers before them. It was bad enough that

Cuba had a reputation as the brothel of the Caribbean in a desperate bid for foreign currency, he'd once pronounced his country's prostitutes the healthiest and best educated on the planet but this was hardly a laudable distinction. The tyrant was accustomed to being exceptional, and so he didn't expect that rules governing ordinary human mortality should apply to him. Nothing in his life had followed anyone else's rules, so why must he go the way of every mediocre nobody on the planet? Dying, he'd decided, was a fate for lesser men. He didn't believe in death, at least not for him. From the corner of his eye, he checked the expression on the nurse's face as she cleaned him up. Not a trace of derision or disgust. He'd read her dossier. Twelve years in the secret service, here and abroad. A regular Mata Hari. Certainly she'd had to execute more disagreeable tasks than this. El Comandante struggled to open the window nearest him. Carajo, somebody help me with this goddamn thing! he thundered, prompting the assistant his wife had dubbed El Huele Huele, the ass sniffer, to scurry in and prop it open with a wedge of plywood. Turbulent southeast winds blew straight for his enemies in Miami. The distaste of their collective name *gusanos* was an old poison on his tongue. Those worms were a wiped-out class here, their legacy extinct, and he'd made sure it would stay that way. He elbowed aside a goose-down pillow. He'd left his mark on history with ink, and action, and blood. Not even the most bitter, pathetic exile shopkeeper could deny him that. The tyrant shifted onto his left hip, aiming his scrawny buttocks at the Straits of Florida, and released a sputtering, malodorous stream of flatus.

Take that, you fat-livered idiots, he muttered, slumping against his padded headboard. Satisfied, he smoothed the top sheet over his withered knees, then coughed until he felt his ribs would snap. Another minion appeared with a pitcher of water, his pills, and the day's newspapers stacked high on a portable desk. El Comandante reached for his bifocals. He didn't trust anyone's editing of world events. Nobody saw opportunity, the plots and betrayals bubbling below the surface of politics-as-usual, like he did. His grandchildren had taught him how to navigate the Internet, but its distractions were pernicious: pornography websites and chat rooms on penile implants that wasted precious hours of what remained of his life. These days sex seemed to him a muscle memory in the loins a waxy heat that had telegraphed pleasure to the very root of his spine, rendering him pure animal. Those sensations had vanished in the end, and only the many lives he'd engendered remained, trapping him in nooses of competing demands until he regretted that celibacy hadn't come sooner. There was no mention of him in the foreign press, though it was the official anniversary of the Revolution. Instead other world leaders populated the front pages like so many party crashers. *Hijos de puta*. His government's rag had published a ten-page spread of him that included the same old photographs, recycled interviews, and a picture of his brother Fernando that was a quarter inch larger around than his. Somebody would pay dearly for that mistake. In recent years, El Comandante was usually featured, when he was featured at all, with his junior bad-boy counterpart in Venezuela, now deceased, a megalomaniac toward whom it had been difficult to keep a civil public face. If it hadn't been for his vast reserves of oil, sugar and oil, the island would grind to a halt without either their alliance would've ended like the infamous party at Guatao. Dry toast and oatmeal again. What he wouldn't give right now for a porterhouse steak and three fried eggs, over easy, followed by a double scotch. Fuck it if his insides turned to lead. It was only a matter of time before his dentures were on display at the Museum of the Revolution, which, it so happened, was preparing another cradle-to-near-grave retrospective on his life. El Comandante examined his hands, which bulged from his wrists like oven mitts. The doctors had no explanation for the swelling, which seemed to come and go with the tides. He pulled out a pocket mirror and checked his eyes. They looked pouchy and tinged with gray. Sleep was a luxury he couldn't afford. In any given twenty-four hours, somebody, somewhere, was plotting to kill him. By staying awake, the tyrant believed he could detect plots like radar, monitor conversations, sotto voce vituperations, allegiances forged with a curse and a handshake. Over the years he'd thwarted every dirty trick and assassination attempt in the book. The most ludicrous failures gave him the most pleasure to recount: the exploding Cohiba cigars, the arsenic-laced milk shakes, the foot powder meant to make his beard fall out. There was that memorable CIA agent, too, who'd masqueraded as a journalist the comely Elizabeth Bond, a lesbian, had volunteered for the assignment, certain she could resist her target's charms (she couldn't). Another low point: the sixteen-foot Nile crocodile trained by its exile handlers to attack his femoral artery. The reptile, unleashed at a black-tie affair in Cairo, dispatched the French ambassador instead. The price of power ceaseless vigilance was high, but El Comandante was willing to pay it. Who was it who said if you lived long enough, you'd see your reputation maligned three times? That, in his estimation, was a modest number. Soon enough he planned to set the

record straight, to put an end to the creeping amnesia regarding the glories of his revolution. Hed ordered Fernando to develop a program that would reenact the regimes most illustrious days: the attack on the Moncada barracks; the History Will Absolve Me speech during the despots 1953 trial for treason; the landing of the Granma on the shores of Oriente; the triumph at the Bay of Pigs. El Comandante hoped that these commemorations would draw hordes of touristspolitically sophisticated ones, not the cheap rum and whore chasers currently invading the island. Hard currency in hand, they, too, would help cement his legacy.

The inaugural program, a restaging of the sixty-eight-hour Bay of Pigs invasion, had been scheduled for April but was postponed due to logistical problems until his birthday next month. The tyrant had warned that heads would roll should there be further delays. His ambassadors had extended invitations to dignitaries worldwide and, after extensive auditions, hed personally selected a dashing militiaman to play the younger him. The soldier had no acting experience but boasted impeccable Communist Party credentials and promised to grow a suitably scraggly beard for the role. El Comandante flung aside La Prensa. A staunch ally in the Buenos Aires workers movement had been killed during a strike. It was a much-battered cliché to say that when a man approached the portal of death, even as die-hard an atheist as he would quaver at the prospect of eternal nothingness and beg, at the last humiliating moment, for a priest and the promise of salvation. But to El Lder, God remained an elaborate fiction, at least the God of his Latin-spouting Jesuit teachers. If, as theyd maintained, every man was made in His image, why not simply go a step further and become Him? After all, the tyrant hadnt merely survived, hed livedflauntingly, outrageouslyin the shadow of an imperial power bent on his destruction for the better part of adjoining centuries. If that didnt qualify him for deification, nothing could. He rejected agnosticism, too, though an agnostic was probably the most sensible thing to be if you were a gambling man. These days when he tried to imagine God, something he did more often of late, he pictured Him as a massive, pulsing neural network of simultaneity and multidimensional consciousness. Come to think of it, this image was pretty identical to his own job. Such sacrilegious thinking pleased the tyrant. Years ago hed incensed the islands archbishop by arguing that the Church, given its propensity for propaganda, dogmatism, and absolute authority, could be construed as the perfect Socialist state; a good Catholic as the perfect, unquestioning Socialist man. Even death was a form of socialism, leveling the noble and the ignoble, the king and the humble shoveler of shit to the same classless fate. In the end, who was to say what matteredillusion, or reality? After more than a half century of revolutionary reality, not a single soul on the island couldve survived without illusion. Revolution required illusion. The two went hand in glove, like a plate of rice and beans. His revolution had attempted to wrest dreams of a better future from the ever gristly, unyielding presentand without the luxury of an afterlife either. At the very least, itd provided every citizen with this: the opportunity to participate in the greatest narrative in modern times. In the end, Cuba could support just one utopiahis. Why? Because nobody on the island had bigger cojones than he did. Nadie. Except perhaps, at one time, his father. The tyrant recalled his first vision, at age four, of Paps prodigious pinga, steaming like a locomotive after a hot bath and flanked by grapefruit-size balls (or so theyd seemed to him) that hung confidently, hirsutely, where his thick thighs flared. That same evening, as his mother bathed the little despot-to-be, taking care to wash the pink bud of his manhood and dust it with enough talcum powder to make it look like a lump of sugared dough, he worked up the courage to ask: Mami, will all of me grow? His puzzled mother had helped him into his calzoncillos before it occurred to her what he was asking. Ay, mijito, your pinga will be the greatest in the land, in all the Americas, perhaps in all the world! The boy was cautiously pleased. Okay, the greatest. But will it also be the biggest? His mother grinned, eyes shining, and brought her lips so close to his that he inhaled the garlic from that nights ajiaico stew. Dont you doubt that for a second. The pint-size tyrants chest filled with pride, and he strutted off to bed with big dreams, the biggest of all. He imagined his pinguita growing and growing until it floated high in the skies, a massive flesh-toned dirigible draped with parachute huevones and a proud snout that served as the control room for the whole impressive operation and that nobodynot even the Yankees, with their warships and gun batterieswould ever dare shoot down. Good night, mi amor. His mother kissed him on the forehead and gave him an encouraging pat. Sleep with the angels. Good night, Mami. And with that, the pint-size tyrant rolled over and fell deeply, happily asleep. Caf As if my nerves werent already shot, now the coffeemakers are exploding all over the island. The government is distributing this half-assed caf mezclado made with chickpeas. Chickpeas! The mixture clogs up the coffeemakers, heats up too fast, andPCATA! Already two people have died, a viejita in Pinar del Ro lost her hyperthyroid eye, and I dont know how many others have been seriously injured by this latest descaro. Not to mention the holes and purple blotches on everyones ceilings. I, for one, prefer the blotches to my old,

peeling paint. I swear this must be part of a larger conspiracy to keep us down. How can we protest or organize against the state when we fear for our lives making coffee? This is terrorism at its worst! Hummus terrorism! Mira, Im going to put the flame on low then head out to the garden and wait. If it blows, at least I wont go with it. Aracely Mondragn, caffeine addict Miami Goyo Herrera wasnt afraid to die, but he was tired of waiting for death. Waiting for the body to shut down, organ by organ, accruing its critical mass of toxins and blockages. There were places in Switzerland, hed heard, that would facilitate the dying; expensive, antiseptic places in the Alps where tubercular patients once waited like so many hothouse orchids. Already, he mightve died on any number of occasions in the fifty-plus years since hed left Cuba: the time he got hit by a taxi on Lexington Avenue, his right leg crushed and shortened by an inch; or the night he was held up outside his Manhattan diner, pistol-whipped and left for dead. There was that kidney stone, too, that nearly killed him in 1978. But if Goyo had learned anything in his eighty-six years, it was that pain alone didnt kill a man. Besides, he wanted that son of a bitch in Havana to die first. Years ago he and El Comandante had been acquaintances, Goyo told anyone who would listen. But the truth was a lesser and more complicated reality. The two had barely known each other at the university, where Goyo was a quiet chemistry major and he was a loudmouthed law student perpetually hungry for the limelight. Goyo had spent many waking hours and a good number of sleeping ones regretting the lost opportunity of shooting the bastard. In those days it wasnt uncommon for even a quiet chemistry major to carry a gun, and Goyo was a crack shot, having practiced since boyhood on tin cans and chickens. Ay, he would gladly give up everything he ownedhis oceanfront condo on Key Biscayne, his collapsing brownstone off Second Avenue, every last cent of his considerable fortune, even the weekly rendezvous with the shapely bank teller Vilma Espn, who was a magician of hand-mouth coordination and kept him in fighting form since his wife of fifty-nine years had died unexpectedly last New Years Evefor the privilege of killing his nemesis. Hed wear chains on his ankles, chisel stones for his remaining days, even become a goddamn Democrat for the gratification of personally expediting the tyrants journey back to the Devil, with whom hed obviously made a pact. It wasnt for politics alone that Goyo wouldve murdered that swaggering cock but for his mistreatment of the woman Goyo had loved above all others: Adelina Ponti, a pianist whose interpretations of Schuberts early piano sonatas had won his heart. That good-for-nothing had disgraced Adelina, left her with a child, a boy she named after her errant lover, who never recognized el nio as his own. For two years, Goyo anonymously sent Adelina money to help support her son, until the day he learned that shed hanged herself from a chandelier in her parents sunny music room, her bare feet grazing the keys of their Steinway baby grand. A plaster bust of Franz Schubert stood watch on a nearby shelf. Goyos reasons for wanting to kill the tyrant multiplied prodigiously after the Revolutionhis fathers suicide, his younger brother Marcoss death in the Bay of Pigsand his hatred deepened with the ensuing decades of Communist corruption and lies. There was no one in the world he loathed more, no one for whom he stoked a more bottomless fury, no one else he unwaveringly blamed for invading, oppressing, and misshaping his life than that fearmongering, fatigueswearing, egotistical brute who continued to call the shots from his deathbed overlooking the sea. His fixation with ending the tyrants life had begun to consume Goyo day and night. The thought that he could die a hero tantalized him, probably more than it should. His heroism wouldve been greater had he undertaken the mission as a young man, but even grizzled and arthritic as he was, he might yet achieve mythic status. **HERE LIES A CUBAN HERO.** Goyo imagined these words chiseled on his headstone, the wreaths and tributes, the eulogies and Mart-inspired poetry read in his honor. Luisa might even grow jealous of the pretty women whod sigh as they surrendered a rose on his tomb, praying that a man of his stature might someday sweep them off their feet. He reached for his inhaler and took a bitter breath. Goyos lungs had weakened since his bout of pneumonia last winter on an emergency visit to New York. His Turkish tenants had set fire to his brownstone while grilling lamb shish kebabs, nearly asphyxiating the other occupants. The building had become one unceasing headache. Goyo wouldve sold it in a heartbeat, but the real estate taxes alone would amount to millions and leave him next to nothing. He was trapped, and no amount of wistful gazing at the sea would change that sorry fact. A regatta was under way in Biscayne Bay, and Goyo raised his binoculars to get a better look. It was the same parade of self-important fools hed battled at the yacht club before submitting his resignation and telling them all, in no uncertain terms, to go to hell. This hadnt done much for his social life. But it wasnt the solitude of endless tropical days that bothered Goyo. After years of crushing work in New York and a frenetic retirement with the ever-restless Luisa, old age held for him an appealing laxness, a mellowing and decadence of the flesh, the freedom to napsomething he did despite the crises afflicting him dailylike the feral cats that used to roam his childhood village in Honduras. Smarter people

than he had philosophized about confronting the deaf immensity of death. He wasn't particularly original in his thinking. But he found it ironic that true languor—precursor to the eternal one, of course—hadn't invaded his bones until after his wife had succumbed to a brain aneurysm. Luisa had been aggressively social and socially climbing, especially in Miami, but too mistrustful to have any real friends. Goyo had loved her profoundly at first, then more shallowly, until the feeling devolved into obligatory affection and lapsed into ordinary tolerance. Love had flared at the beginning, but then who the hell knew what happened? Decades of tired entanglements later, he still didn't know. Goyo felt unending shame when he thought about his wife, partly due to the guilt she'd induced in him over his affairs with their diners' siren waitresses; for gambling away a million dollars in the stock market pursuing a bulletproof strategy advocated by his hotshot ex-broker, now incarcerated; for not defending her against the barrage of insults by his mother early in their marriage. The shame, however, was most piercing, most unendurable, when Goyo revisited what he considered his principal failing: surrendering his children to his wife's violence and unreasonableness. His son, Goyito, now pushing sixty, lived on disability in the Florida panhandle, his brain irremediably fried by cocaine and further addled by the medications he took by the fistful to prevent him from killing himself.

Alina, six years younger, was troubled in her own peculiar ways. Ever since she'd come to live with him ostensibly to help him recover from precipitous widowhood, Goyo had suspected her motives. His daughter had no visible means of support, had taken up long-distance swimming (he could spot her now, porpoise-like, making her way along the horizon), and when she wasn't swimming, snapped her fancy cameras in his face. The other day Alina had the nerve to ask him to pose nude for her. Goyo was the first to admit that he didn't have much in the way of artistic inclinations, but pose nude for his daughter? This was perversity, plain and simple. He'd heard from one of the garage attendants that Alina had asked the same of other retirees in his condominium, embarrassing Goyo to no end. He had half a mind to kick her out for this alone. Within the hour, if she hadn't drowned or been eaten by sharks, Alina would walk through the front door tracking in rivulets of sand and disturbing him with the strange configurations of seaweed plastered to her manly shoulders. Goyo wondered whether El Comandante suffered such troubles with his own children, a veritable tribe at this point, if the reports he'd read in *El Nuevo Herald* were even half true. Some years ago,

one of the tyrant's illegitimate daughters had written a tell-all memoir about growing up on the island, neglected and suffering from bulimia, an all-but-unheard-of disease among her hungry fellow citizens. The book had made her a celebrity in Miami for one short-lived season. Unlike his compatriots, Goyo wasn't a blind believer in exile gossip. He'd spent too many years in Manhattan honing his cynicism and reading the *New York Post*. Goyo took pride in his ability to distinguish fact from fiction, the honorable from the crooked, the deal from the scam. Yet this skill seemed increasingly irrelevant at his stage of life. It was all a fiction, he decided, a pliable narrative one could shape, photographs one could freeze at selected junctures, then engage in speculation and pointless deductions. Wasn't that what El Comandante had done? Bent history

to his will? Cunningly divided and spliced it into a seamless whole? The sea was calm, mocking the agitation Goyo felt inside. He was weary of the excuses he'd made for sitting on the sidelines of life, the never-ending rationalizations that choked him like a fetid mangrove swamp. What would he say to El Comandante if they ever met again? Or would they immediately resort to insults and blows? What would they have in common anymore besides arthritis and diverticulitis? Like the tyrant, Goyo had spent his early childhood in the countryside, had two brothers and a Spanish father—Galician, too—who took years to formalize relations with the mother of his children. In short, they were both bastards. Goyo's mother wasn't Cuban by birth but Guatemalan. After she'd borne three sons by her itinerant Spanish lover, the young family moved to coastal Honduras, the headquarters of Arturo Herreras' burgeoning shipping business. Goyo lived on a beach where he once watched the sea recede for a mile before a tidal wave destroyed their town. Undeterred,

Arturo relocated his family to Cuba and finally married Goyo's mother, who was seized thereafter with a sporadic religiosity incited by her gratitude for her good fortune. By then Pap had become very wealthy and Goyo's days on the beach were supplanted by a stint at a Jesuit boarding school in Canada, where he learned Latin, played baseball and the clarinet, and fell in love with chemistry. To this day, the delightful symmetry of the carbon cluster C₆₀ moved Goyo to tears. He'd also closely followed the efforts of chemists to make the polyhedral hydrocarbon dodecahedrane (C₂₀H₂₀), a challenge they finally achieved in 1980. Goyo pricked his finger to read his blood sugar, which was a little high but nothing to panic over. He reached for his pills but forgot which tablets were for what and washed down a random handful with a glass of diluted orange juice. His ailments had accrued faster than he could keep straight, upsetting the color-coding medications system his wife had devised. In descending order of importance, Goyo suffered from heart

disease (hed had a triple bypass four years ago), crippling arthritis in his lower spine and both knees (he walked at a thirty-degree angle to the floor), borderline diabetes, irritable bowel syndrome, and intermittent impotence. Perhaps the impotence shouldve topped the list. It certainly would have in his prime, when he could screw a dozen times in a day and still roar for more. The flotilla had rounded the southern edge of Key Biscayne, returning to the yacht clubs docks. In his boating heyday Goyo and his wife had motored around the Bahamas and other parts of the Caribbean for weeks at a time, usually in winter, when the weather was best. Once he came dangerously close to trespassing Cubas boundary waters. Hed been fishing for marlin, and the efforts of those magnificent fisheach one battled ferociously for its lifehad dared him to try. Goyo got as close as twelve miles off the northeast coast of the island, close enough to imagine the scent of ripening sugarcane, to recall the prance of his best Arabian horse, Velz, on their weekly inspections of the ranch. The days when he was still a master of real things: land, horses, cattle. Twelve miles. A scant twelve miles from his past. Only Luisas hysterical threats (Are you out of your mind? Theyll chop you up for shark bait!) made him turn around. Sometimes Goyo liked to fantasize that he could see, telescopically, back to his homeland; zoom in on his archenemy. What living hell could he concoct for that despot? For inflicting a plague of grief on millions of his countrymen? Goyos first order of business would probably be to tape the bastards mouth shut. Next hed turn off his flat-screen televisions and deprive him of watching the news. (It was said that El Lder compulsively channel-surfed for even a passing mention of himself.) Last, cattle prod in hand, Goyo would force the son of a bitch to listen to a taped litany of every victim, living and dead, whom he had wronged. Goyo could keep this up for eternity, since it would undoubtedly take that long. His daughter often accused Goyo of staying alive for one purpose only: to celebrate the news of the tyrants death. He couldnt deny it. Goyo subscribed to an exile websiteHijodeputa.comthat charted, hourly, the Maximum Leaders body temperature (it was 99.6 degrees the last time Goyo checked, at 7:00 a.m., the apparent result of a minor ear infection). Inside operatives, the website assured its followers, had infiltrated the National Palace, hovered by the dictators bedside, worked as cooks and gardeners in his multiple homes. But if the bastard actually had died as many times as had been prematurely proclaimed, he wouldve lived more lives than Hemingways polydactyl cats. The truth was this: El Comandante had fossilized into a monstrous constant, into time itself. Frank Pass Shoes I guard the room at the Museum of the Revolution that contains the shoes that Frank Pas wore on the day he was executed. I stare at those shoes a lot, eight hours a day most days, and Ive grownwhat is the word?not fond of, exactly, but identified with those shoes, heavy and large for a man neither heavy nor large, and whose life was snuffed outpaf!like a breath extinguishing flame. There are other items in my room at the museum. You might recall, if youve been here, the torture instruments used by Batistas henchmen to pull out prisoners nails. Other contraptions for this and that. But to me, the only things that matter are Frank Pass shoes. Oh, Ive dreamt about those shoes, and the baby-faced man who wore thema legitimate hero of the Revolution. Who talks about him anymore? Like his shoes, the memory of Frank Pas has faded, and I am left wondering what it would be like to try them on, to fill the shoes, as it were, of this great, forgotten man. Let me confess: I am in love with Frank Pas, this dead man, this once-vibrant hero, who I imagine wouldve been a tiger in bed. You know, I like my men dominant, bien machos. Take me, tell me what to do, a slap or two, and Im happy to serve. My husband is too weak for me, too gentle. Sometimes, I think, if only he could wear Frank Pass shoes for one night, to bed, with me, I would die of happiness... Fidelia Gonzlez, museum guardRevue de presseGarcas tremendous empathy for her characters is the magnetic force of her fiction, and her lifeblood theme is the scarring legacy of oppression and brutality, particularly the horrors and absurdities of the Castro regime. In her most honed and lashing novel to date, she goes directly to the source...An ingeniously plotted, boisterous, and brilliantly castigating tale." (Booklist)"Garcia's writing is laced with candor and wit as she portrays the lives of two men united by the past." (Gabe Habash Publishers Weekly)"Darkly hilarious, Garca braids...parallel stories with consummate ease. With a fine balance of wry absurdity and existential poignancy, Garca builds not just a tale of the end of days but a snapshot of the past impact and future reverberations of Cubas revolutiona theme more fascinating than ever as the once-isolated island nation opens itself to the world." (Elle Magazine)"Mordantly funny and insightful...King of Cuba has its roots in long-simmering political strife, but it is finally a novel about the human condition, about aging and loss and undying love for a country that once was paradise, at least in memory." (Colette Bancroft Tampa Bay Times)[A] wry new novel, King of Cuba tell[s] the story of two macho, aging men in alternating voices. These two narratives, interspersed with a chorus of other Cuban voices, combine to define an exhausted country and the bonds between its people. (Bookpage)Garcia's serio-comic novel gives us all the pop delight of a musical based on major historical

events and a devastating portrait of two men and a tyrannical government on the way out. Anyone with an interest in late 20th century politics will find this book a wicked pleasure. (Alan Cheuse National Public Radio)"Fabulously absurdist. Much has been written about Havana vs. Miami... but Garcia's satirical version of events...feels fresh because Garcia sets the novel in modern times. Passions may have cooled, but the anger remains, ossified but still there. King of Cuba is about wish fulfillment, that long-imagined moment for many exiles when they have a chance to confront the man they blame for ruining their country and so many lives. Garcia delivers the conclusion in style but with a caveat: Revenge isn't always what you think it might be." (Amy Driscoll Miami Herald)Garca takes one of the most fascinating political figures of the 20th century and imagines him as a man and, through him, imagines his country. [She] invests her characters and their memories with rich detail. In the end, her subject matter is Cuba. (New York Times Book Review)"Merges the exhaustive research of historical fiction with the suspense of a thriller. Think of King of Cuba as a beach read with great depth, the ideal vacation book for anyone interested in the history and culture of that embargoed island to the south. Whatever your view of this country's ongoing embargo with Cuba, whatever your opinion or hopes...Garcia's book will pique your interest in all things Cuban." (Chapel Hill Herald Sun)"This novel, for the 'initiated' in the political, cultural, and linguistic realities of the two worlds inhabited by Goyo and the Comandante, is an absolute must read. For those not initiated, it should be placed very high on the agenda of books that should be read. King of Cuba is a major achievement by Cristina Garcia. This is an author who will leave her mark on contemporary literature." (Philadelphia Inquirer)"A bittersweet story whose power far outweighs its simple structure. The portrait Garcia paints of [El Comandante] nostalgic but utterly unsentimental, evil but magnetic is the best thing she's ever written, a pitch-perfect study of tyranny in winter." (Steve Donoghue The Washington Post)