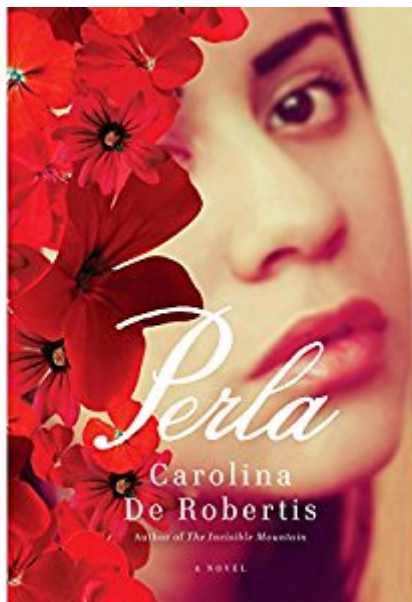


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# Perla



## Synopsis

A coming-of-age story, based on a recent shocking chapter of Argentine history, about a young woman who makes a devastating discovery about her origins with the help of an enigmatic houseguest. Perla Correa grew up a privileged only child in Buenos Aires, with a cold, polished mother and a straitlaced naval officer father, whose profession she learned early on not to disclose in a country still reeling from the abuses perpetrated by the deposed military dictatorship. Perla understands that her parents were on the wrong side of the conflict, but her love for her papá is unconditional. But when Perla is startled by an uninvited visitor, she begins a journey that will force her to confront the unease she has suppressed all her life, and to make a wrenching decision about who she is, and who she will become.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

One of the best books I have read in the past year, and I read many books. A fascinating way to tell a story that would still be good if told in a straightforward way. Very clever and creative. Characters are complex and Perla is wonderful. I love magical realism and it works excellently to tell a very sad but redeeming story. Perla, the character is fascinating and courageous.

First let me say, Perla is a terrific story, with excellent use of magical realism, told in lyrical prose. Everyone should read it. That said, the beautiful writing is also the book's major flaw: it is overwritten to the point of having every page scream, "look how beautifully I can write...line after

line, page after page." In the case of this writer's clear talent, a little would go a long way. Each page is so beautifully composed, often with single sentences that stretch for pages, that the writing pretension takes away from the powerful story because the writing demands you notice it, read it slowly. Often it takes away from the emotion rather than intensifies it. In moderation, this lyrical writing would be a good thing, but there is no moderation here. Still, I very much enjoyed the book, and being familiar with the subject of the Disappeared and with Buenos Aires, found it compelling in its storytelling. Only one other minor flaw: the ending is rather pat, with everything neatly tied up with a big, happy bow. If only life had such hopeful endings.

Let me begin by stating that reading this book had the same effect on me as visiting places like ESMA (the oft-mentioned clandestine detention center in the novel) or similar memory sites in Chile (which, like Argentina, also suffered under a bloody military dictatorship), such as Villa Grimaldi. I was left with the same emotions that I carried whenever I visited those places, meaning that oftentimes, while reading this book, I would have to take a break, get something to drink, go walk around, etc., because everything about it was just \*too much.\* Let me also say that, until now, no book has ever made me break out in sobs in the middle of reading it. Anyway, PERLA was positively phenomenal and far exceeded the already very high expectations that I had for it (I was already huge fan of de Robertis' debut THE INVISIBLE MOUNTAIN). When I saw that de Robertis was writing a novel about the desaparecidos (the disappeared) of Argentina, I started counting down the days until its release. The phenomenon of the extreme right-wing Cold War-era dictatorships in the Southern Cone (including the dictatorship in Argentina - the "National Reorganization Process") is a subject I've studied for years and, for the longest time, I've been thirsting for a truly excellent English-language novel about this subject. PERLA is it, and far more. I won't rehash the plot, because that's what the book blurb is for (I also don't want to give away any spoilers, but if you are in any way familiar with the history of the Dirty War, you'll catch onto what Perla's "secret" is very early into the book). Instead I'll list some of the main things I loved about this book. Firstly, everyone was so real (character-wise). There were no cardboard cutouts representing particular viewpoints (when in cases like this, is really easy to do), whether that be the former Naval officer and his wife or the left-wing journalist boyfriend. Rather everyone, no matter who they are, was instead a fleshed-out human being, with both good and bad qualities. On this same note, de Robertis' portrayal of Perla's inner struggle is done very well and in a very realistic fashion. Another thing I will commend de Robertis on is her portrayal of the oftentimes gut-wrenching scenes from the "mysterious houseguest's" point of view. I believe there is a fine line between staying true to what is

historically accurate (and some extremely brutal things definitely happened to people who were made to disappear in Argentina) and gore and torture for the sake of gore and torture (aka "torture porn"). De Robertis, unlike many people, succeeded. I felt these scenes conveyed the true nature of the brutality during that era (as in, they did not soften it to make it more palatable to readers), but at the same time, I felt that she wrote these scenes in a respectful way that didn't want to include violence and gore for, well, the sake of violence and gore. This speaks very strongly of de Robertis' ability as a writer, because only very talented writers can pull this off, I believe. That being said, they were still extremely painful and difficult to read, even for me (and I've read tons of pretty graphic survivors testimonies from this time). Lastly, I will say that it was so refreshing to read a book on this subject by someone who obviously knows the city of Buenos Aires and this particular period of Argentina's history. Too often, when I read novels about this subject, it is painfully apparent that the author has just skimmed the Wikipedia page on the Dirty War and has relied too heavily on the phenomenon of a repressive government disappearing people (which happened before the National Reorganization Process and continues to happen to this day, i.e. it is not something unique to Argentina) to fuel their story. I applaud de Robertis for her incredible and 110% accurate descriptions of Buenos Aires (I've spent a somewhat significant amount of time there and can attest to practically everything she says). I also loved, loved, LOVED how she included cultural tidbits of the time as well (i.e. she talks about Sui Generis, a popular Simon and Garfunkel-esque band in Argentina during the 1970s), which really shows that she knows what she's talking about. Other notes:- I loved the use of water as a reoccurring motif, the fact that the spirit was of the water and the water accompanied him wherever he went. I also loved how the "mysterious houseguest" was consistently thirsty (because one of the side effects of the electric shocks that were used as torture was extreme thirst - only you couldn't drink anything or else your insides would explode) and always wanted Perla to "feed" him water.- The structure. It is non-linear, but I was absolutely in love with it and felt that it worked well for the story. The structure was actually one of my favorite parts of this book, because it kept you wanting to read, even if, like me, you'd already guessed the "secret" early on.- At first I had trouble following the narrative as it shifted from Perla's POV to the spirit's POV, but it became easier the more I got engrossed in the story. It wasn't a problem at all after 2-3 chapters or so.

This book was absolutely riveting as it looked at Argentina's dirty war. It was magical realism at its realistic best. Thank you Book Bub for drawing it to my attention.

Carolina de Robertis' *Perla* is one of the most beautiful, heartfelt pieces of literature I've read. I know that there are a large number of five-star reviews for this book, but they are well deserved. Robertis' prose is magnetic. I picked up this book a few days ago, meaning to glance at only a few pages to learn a little about the book before returning to the nonfiction book I was reading. After a few words, I "fell" into the story. I stopped reading the other book (even though I picked it up again after finishing *Perla*). The book's language drew me in: it's so rich and warm and genuine. Robertis uses the style of "Magic Realism" throughout the novel to tell the story. The plot? In the middle of a night, *Perla*, an Argentinian psychology student who has recently broken up with her boyfriend, finds a stranger on her floor while her parents are on vacation. The strange man, who is wet and dripping and appears out of thin air, is actually a ghost-- one of the "disappeared" who was killed during Argentina's "Dirty War" from 1976 to 1983. More than 30,000 people were imprisoned, put into camps, tortured, then murdered. The babies born to the "disappeared" inside these concentration camps were held; the majority were not returned to their true families. *Perla* and the ghost-stranger have a hidden bond, that is slowly revealed as the story continues. de Robertis' language and metaphors are poetic, lovely. I adore the "Magic Realism" style, and envy writers like de Robertis and Toni Morrison, who are able to use this style to create true literary masterpieces and works of art through fiction. One aside, de Robertis' book reminded me of a Satoshi Kon anime (*Paranoia Agent*). I know some literary snobs will cringe at the comparison to an anime. But, Kon (God rest his soul), like de Robertis, created works of art about the psyches of women and others using "Magical Realism". I'm sure if he were alive today, Kon might have approached de Robertis to make an anime about this work. The novelist also makes me want to pick up books by Jorge Luis Borges, too. Some reviewers have dismissed her style as being "overwritten" and "weird". But, I kindly disagree. It is literature and art, not a regular, run-of-the-mill pop novel. If you don't like literary Magical Realism style books, where everything and anything is possible, and language is florid and lush, then look elsewhere. In Vine program, we're usually given free, paper-bound evaluation copies of the books to read, as was the case of de Robertis' *Perla*. I'm a bibliophile who adores books. I love having copies of novels that I love on hand to read again. This work moved me so much, I purchased a copy for my Kindle, and I plan to buy a hard copy for my collection. I also plan to purchase the novelist's other novel, *Invisible Mountain*. I love, love, love this book! *Perla* is one of those characters, like Trudi Montag from *Stones from the River* who will continue to "live" with me. Yes, I loved "*Perla*" that much. This is one of my favorite books of all time. Highly, highly recommended.

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Perla

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