



Het huis aan de lagune

Rosario Ferré, May van Sligter (translator)

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Als een Puertoricaanse vrouw de geschiedenis van haar familie en die van haar man opschrijft, heeft dat vervaagde gevolgen omdat ze hem niet bevallen vanwege hun openhartigheid.

Het huis aan de lagune Details

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From Reader Review Het huis aan de lagune for online ebook

Maggie says

a look at the divisions among the elite in puerto rico about the future of the island. should it remain a commonwealth, become a state or become it's own nation? this is the question addressed throughout the story of three generations of a wealthy puerto rican family. the story also gives rise to other thoughts and questions on class as well as race.

the story is written as being narrated through authorship by isabel, the main character, but also gives the very different point of view of her husband quintin at intervals throughout the book, as he finds her manuscript and gives his opinion and version of events she has written in the previous chapter. entertaining read.

Stacie (BTR) says

Did not finish. I read (maybe) one fifth. More and more, I am becoming comfortable with abandoning unfinished books if I'm just not getting any value out of it. This read like several, long, fictional Wikipedia entries--not like a novel. I found there to be a lack of plot, rhythm, character development, etc.

Ryl says

The House on the Lagoon follows the fortunes of the Mendizabal family from Buenaventura Mendizabal's arrival in Puerto Rico on July 4, 1917 to the mid 1990s, while also chronicling the history of the island as a U.S. territory. An orphan from a small town in Spain, Buenaventura hopes to find work in Puerto Rico as an accountant. By a lucky chance, he is introduced to Rebecca Arrigoitia, the only daughter of a wealthy family. They marry soon after their first meeting and Buenaventura begins to import gourmet food from Europe, possibly as a cover for smuggling operations during World War I. The Mendizabals become one of the wealthiest and most influential families on the island, but as time goes by they are revealed to be one of the most corrupt. Only Petra, Buenaventura's black housekeeper, knows all of the skeletons in the family closets and keeps their secrets faithfully.

Intertwined with the story of Buenaventura's family is the history of the Montforts, coffee growers from the mountains. The Montfort matriarch, Valentina (Abby), holds her small family together through the various tragedies that plague them: the mysterious murder of Abby's husband, her son's suicide, and her daughter-in-law's insanity. Abby's granddaughter, Isabel, marries Quintín Mendizabal, Buenaventura's oldest son, and after many years of an increasingly loveless marriage, witnesses the destruction of both families through corruption and the changing politics of Puerto Rico.

The novel is "written" by Isabel who hides her manuscript from her husband in various places around the Mendizabal mansion. Quintín finds the manuscript each time Isabel hides it from him, though, and often adds his own version of the events that refute or expand upon what his wife has written. These interjections reveal the conflicts that are tearing the family apart, conflicts that are mirrored in the history and politics of the island itself. In part, the novel serves as an introduction to Puerto Rico for American readers who know little about it and its relationship to the United States.

Darrah says

The House on the Lagoon takes its readers through a multi-generational history of Puerto Rico as it was before and after it became an American territory. I went into this novel knowing virtually nothing about Puerto Rico and its history and was interested to see how Rosario Ferré painted Puerto Rico's history while making social and political comments about the independence movement, race relations, and the country's relationship with the United States.

Ferré relates this history through her character Isabel, who is writing her own novel about her family and her husband's history. Her husband, Quintín, is not too thrilled about how she is portraying him and his family, of which he is VERY proud of. I see Quintín as your typical upper-class asshole who, having experienced these negative aspects of his family members, refuses to let go of his pride when he finds pages of Isabel's manuscript. So...there's obviously going to be some conflict there. As for Isabel, I like her as a writer as she takes us through the chapters of her manuscript, but I feel like her present day self was still somewhat of a mystery. I would have loved to read about her reactions to Quintín finding and editing her manuscript. But alas, that does not exist in the book.

Alexis Vélez says

Espectacular, buenísima, excelente, épica. Bien acertado lo que he visto en varias críticas sobre la comparación de la misma con Cien años de Soledad, mi versión hasta tiene un árbol genealógico impreso en las primeras páginas que es super útil para no perderse en la maraña familiar de la historia. La historia es un tanto trágica y te deja muchas veces boquiabierto con las cosas que le ocurren a ésta familia, pero además es una rica narración de casi un siglo de historia puertorriqueña bien documentada y sabiamente entre-mezclada en la trama de los personajes. Ésta es la primera obra que leo de Rosario Ferré y quedé más que satisfecho y orgulloso de tener una tan buen escritora en mi país. Altamente recomendada.

Judy says

I belong to four reading groups, all of which meet in real time. Because I read so much, I am always dying for people to discuss books with, but reading group picks are an unpredictable mix. What a treat it is then to read a great book I might otherwise have missed if it weren't for those reading groups.

The House on the Lagoon is historical fiction set in Puerto Rico; Rosario Ferre is a Puerto Rican writer, poet and essayist. She writes in both Spanish and English, self-translating her books. The English edition of this novel is apparently out of print, but can be found in libraries and through used book sellers.

Buenaventura Mendizabal, a Spanish immigrant, arrived penniless on the shores of Puerto Rico in 1917 with nothing to recommend him but a good family name. He rose to be a wealthy man in the highest levels of Puerto Rican society and begat a dynasty, passing on the ruthless and violent ways of Spanish conquest. Through the generations his descendants intermingled and even at times intermarried with other levels of

society and heritage, as is the way of colonized lands.

When I was in grade school, we were taught that Puerto Rico was an island of friendly people who were proud to live in a United States territory and whose fondest dream was that their island would become a state. So typical of the "Social Studies" taught to us in the 1950s. Reading *The House on the Lagoon* gave me a much truer picture of Puerto Rican history in the 20th century.

So that is fine on an educational level, but this novel works on many levels, one of which is a clear-eyed look at the position of women in a culture that combines Spanish aristocracy, wealth and business with the indigenous population. In that regard it is a triumph of historical writing including politics, finance, the arts and real social studies, as well as a finely wrought piece of literature.

Isabel Monfort is writing her first novel. It is to be a history of the Mendizabal family, known to her because she is married to Quentin, the grandson of Buenaventura and current head of the family business. In alternating chapters we read Isabel's novel-in-progress and Quentin's reactions to her writing. Thus we are given both the male and female perspective as the history evolves and leads to a stunning conclusion.

Many thanks to the wonderful Mary Helen Ponce, a fine writer herself and member of one of my reading groups, for recommending the book. We eagerly await Mary Helen's next novel!

Vaness M. says

Although a bit slow at times, I greatly enjoyed reading this book. For starters, it gave me historical insights that I didn't get in my school years in Puerto Rico. It also let me know more of a society that, thankfully, I never got to experience as a child. The racism and political turmoil that Ferré describes, those were issues that were shielded from me growing up, although I did get to hear about them as an adult. My parents told me my dad's family were opposed to him, of White, European descent, marrying my mom, a beautiful, mulatto girl. While my mom was congratulated for "marrying up" and "cleaning her descendants' blood," my dad was shamed by his family for marrying a "negra." It's funny and sad at the same time. =/

Anywho, I'm only giving the book a 4-star rating because of the ending. The last chapter takes you into a frenzy of emotions; it moves so quickly and then it stops, all of a sudden! It just left me with the feeling that there were things left unsaid, things that still needed to be resolved, although I do know they were resolved, somehow.

Bucket says

"Between the writing and the reading of a text, things change, the world goes round, marriages and love affairs are made and unmade. Wasn't all storytelling, in a sense, like that?... Each chapter is like a letter to the reader; its meaning isn't completed until it is read by someone."

So Isabel says to her husband, and so is *The House on the Lagoon*. The novel is generational story of Isabel's and her husband's families, but it's also a game of tug-of-war between the two of them that escalates more and more rapidly as the story continues.

I read this book to gain a better sense of Puerto Rico and got that - particular in the sections was about the statehood/ independence debate - but this novel makes use of two unreliable narrators to tell the same story through two sets of eyes. Of course, it's no mystery that the author sides with Isabel.

I enjoyed this novel, both as a cultural dive and a literary experience.

Themes: Puerto Rico, family, writing, politics, culture, race

Alesa says

This family saga is a terrific introduction to Puerto Rican history and culture. It follows many generations of a single family, and we learn about politics, economics, prejudice, social mobility and women's issues.

However, I didn't finish it, and this was (I think) due to reading it in Kindle format. I found it hard to keep track of all the characters through the generations. There was a family tree at the beginning of the book, but it was too small to read on the Kindle. Plus, I couldn't keep going back and forth to the front because of being on a Kindle. (It would have been way easier to flip to the front of a physical book.) So I never did find out what happened to all of the very vivid characters. Boo.

Wittch says

This book follows the fortunes of a family caught up in the politics of Puerto Rico in a deeply moving way. The contrast between the haves and have nots, the racial underpinnings, of women trying to be against a stultifying patriarchy was skillfully rendered.

Ksenia (vaenn) says

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Marie Hew says

Enjoyable multi-generational tale about a well-to-do family from Puerto Rico that spans a century of familial secrets, drama, social climbing and the desperate need to protect the reputation of their supposedly prominent clan. I really liked how Ferré talks to the reader through the two narrators of the novel and revealing the internal dialogue that each of them have about one another. Literary elements aside, I liked this book because it puts PR in a historical context that most mainlanders know nothing about. I got enough of a flavor of Puerto Rican history and political limbo that makes me want to learn more.

The part that tickled me the most was the use of Vassar College in the female narrator's personal background. Go Brewers!

Katie says

The English version is called "The House on the Lagoon" and it was originally written in English although she's Puerto Rican and lots of her work is in Spanish. I love Ferre's combination of great storytelling, colorful prose and history and politics of Puerto Rico. I loved this book.

Osvaldo says

I enjoyed this book. I love a multi-generational narrative and the conceit of a wife writing her (and her husband's) family history as a kind of open secret, and her husband reading it nightly and adding his own dissenting perspective on events and her writing style is brilliant. I just wish Ferré had been more experimental - had actually included elisions and marginalia, for example.

The most troublesome part of the book for me was the easy racism of its characters and the Puerto Rican society it describes, not because it does not ring true (it does - I'm Puerto Rican, I am well-acquainted with the colorism of my own people), but because very few characters ever speak up against it in any kind of productive or compelling way. This is especially true of the narrator, whose prose never highlights a deeper absurdity and incoherence in racialized views. I've read a little Ferré in her native Spanish (this book was her first written in English) and found it occasionally problematic despite her obviously well-intentioned liberal outlook on race. The nearly magical troop of negros that live in the basement and are led by una bruja Petra

(the Rock) that serve the Mendizabal family is a missed opportunity for a third version of the narrative, so instead these character are basically defined by service and race.

The take on statehood/independista movement in this book is heartbreaking, though the description of the radicalized independistas is a little caricatured.

Still, despite my criticism, I really did enjoy this book, both its use of Puerto Rican history (its willingness to deviate from the record) and its multivocality. I appreciated its critique of the toxicity of Puerto Rican masculinity. I admired Ferre's deft prose, especially when parts seem intentionally written to demonstrate her narrator's development of writing craft - which is something a reader can't appreciate until it is pointed out later. This is a rather brilliant, but risky move, since those shaky early chapters made some of the reading a slog. Fortunately, this does not last and the formal elements make up for it.

Vicky Hunt says

A Novel with Layers

The House on the Lagoon is an interesting concept. It is a novel about race and the history of Puerto Rico wrapped up in the history of two families. The wife of a marriage between these two Castillian/ Puerto Rican families is writing a novel inside the book. "Her novel" is titled 'The House on the Lagoon,' and is the history of the two families that have lived in the house there on the lagoon for a few generations. The wife, Isabel, goes back and forth, weaving in and out of the generations, with a time line that is hard to pin down. But it is always interesting. In the meantime, Isabel's own family is progressing through time. Isabel's husband finds bits of her novel over the course of the book, and is angry about the things she is writing, (and hiding.) Naturally, the ending is rather surprising. It all comes together very well. And it does a remarkable job of reflecting the impact of race on their city.

I read this as a part of my Around the World in 80 Books Challenge for Puerto Rico. I enjoyed it in the Audible format. My next stop will be the Dominican Republic.

Ann says

Having visited Ponce and San Juan, I enjoyed learning about the people and the culture. In my opinion, this story is about the rights of women, and the female characters are strong women. The grandmother who encourages the mother to abort her pregnancy so that she is not bogged down. Then Isobel who decides to write a novel only to have her husband violate her privacy to read it secretly. The book gave more insight to the debate on the island about what their relationship to the United States should be.

Angela M says

Thanks to Open Road Integrated Media and NetGalley for the opportunity to read this book.

I don't know how much of this story is true to history, but when reading this I certainly felt as if it was the history of Puerto Rico depicted by the story of these people .We see the good, the bad and (I know cliché) but the very ugly things too, about Quintin's and Isabel's families covering over seven decades.

The author has woven the history of the island of Puerto Rico around their story and that of their, parents and grandparents. The culture, the political landscape, as well as the intimate lives of these people make for a compelling read.

Isabel is writing the novel we are reading and she has hidden her manuscripts. Quintin finds Isabel's novel and wonders why she portrays his family the way she does and he begins to annotate her novel. So whose story is the right one? I'm not always sure but their parents and grandparents and a slew of other people make for some interesting characters.

This is for me a three star book. Just way too much going on , kind of like one big soap opera, a huge cast of characters , differing versions of stories and at times I found it a bit confusing . Maybe that's how I'm supposed to feel .Yet there are some interesting things about this book that draw you in.

Rachel says

This book is not only beautiful, it is surprisingly beautiful. As touching and poetic as Maya Angelou's I know why the caged bird sings, and more exotic. It is almost biblical in it's epic telling of this family's journey. Read it! The prologue begins "Before I ever loved a woman, I wagered my heart on chance and violence won it over."

Lisa says

I picked this up after hearing two words - Puerto Rico. Being that's where my family is from and that I'm always trying to read more Hispanic authors, I was instantly drawn to it.

This is a story, translated from Spanish by the author herself, that deals with the historical events of Puerto Rico. It involves a women telling the story of her husband's family as well as her own through several years. It's multi-generational involving a lot of characters, many events, a long timeline and it's all worth it.

What I favored most in this book is Ferré's empowering look of women and their roles throughout the years. You have women who did what was expected of them such as raise a family and mind the home and those who did what was considered unacceptable things like read poetry, invest in art and fought the right to live their own life. Ferré does a great job on portraying feminism and how each woman was strong in their own way with the obstacles that crossed their path. I was completely engrossed and enjoyed many of the characters and the historical aspect, not just Puerto Ricos but how slavery was incorporated, the business aspect on importing goods, the economy, the relationship with the US, voting etc.

Joann Dietch says

Wonderful book which I actually had to order through Barnes and Noble. Interesting all local libraries had only picked up the subsequently written books after the fame of this one. I really enjoy the genre of the family saga. I believe this genre is the best form of complete character development because nothing is more revealing about ourselves than our family histories.
