



## Dreaming in Cuban

*Cristina García*

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## Dreaming in Cuban Cristina García

Here is the dreamy and bittersweet story of a family divided by politics and geography by the Cuban revolution. It is the family story of Celia del Pino, and her husband, daughter and grandchildren, from the mid-1930s to 1980. Celia's story mirrors the magical realism of Cuba itself, a country of beauty and poverty, idealism and corruption. DREAMING IN CUBAN presents a unique vision and a haunting lamentation for a past that might have been.

## Dreaming in Cuban Details

Date : Published June 8th 2011 by Ballantine Books (first published 1992)

ISBN :

Author : Cristina García

Format : Kindle Edition 274 pages

Genre : Fiction, Historical, Historical Fiction, Magical Realism



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## From Reader Review Dreaming in Cuban for online ebook

### Giulia says

**1.5 stars** because I feel bad giving just one.

I simply did not enjoy this book. I just kept reading it to get to the end and not because I liked reading it. There were some paragraphs I completely skipped and a few I quite \*almost\* appreciated.

The plot revolves around the life of three generations, from grandmother to mom and to daughter. Their story alternates Cuba and New York City as their background and we are like an audience admiring the show of their life.

There are a few reasons I did not love the book.

- The characters were poorly developed and I didn't feel sympathy for any of them. I was interested in maybe two of them at different moments, but I just didn't feel they were the *right* kind of characters is that possible? Or were they so real I did not enjoy their presence? I don't know.
- This book made me feel sad. I wasn't happy when I was reading, I didn't feel *any* kind of emotions. I think that is quite bad for a book, as I like to feel something, even if it is just anger or disappointment. I was just sad and not inclined on continue the story **because** of the story itself.
- I was expecting much more after reading the back cover. I was expecting a much larger presence of the two different locations, but it did not happen. I was just stuck with a lot of smaller details about them and I was like "*Yes... and now what?!*".

All in all, I struggled **a lot** whit reading this one. And I just kept pushing through because I do not like not finishing a book. Was it a waste of time? Probably.

At least, I can finally say that it's over. Onto the next book now.

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### Raquel says

Read this once before years ago. I forgot the plot entirely but I remember disliking it immensely. I decided to give it another go. I'm slogging through it and disliking it immensely all over again. Do not know if I can make myself finish.... but I have a real problem leaving books unfinished! I dislike every single character in the book and am having problems caring what happens to them. The disjointed style and absolute darkness of the story make it seem more like a nightmare than a dream. I feel like there is better literature out there about the Cuban diaspora that is not so all-encompassingly bleak. This book does not capture the spirit of joie de vivre that most Cubans have--a spirit that carries them through their darkest, most harrowing days and that allows them to live on despite the obstacles and hardships of life either on or off the island. The women in this book might be resilient, but they seem to have such a grudge against life that they do not seem Cuban at all. I also feel like a lot of the magical realism in the book is forced and feels out of place.

\*\*\*\* UPDATE \*\*\*\*

After completing the book, I feel a little less negatively toward it than I did the first time I read it. I still wasn't wild about it, but I enjoyed the ending of the book more than any of the rest of it. I actually enjoyed the ambiguous ending as well.

The family story felt too scattered--it was difficult to see how each family member's story related to the other and there were so many narratives to keep track of that it was tedious--reading a book should feel effortless. You can encounter big thoughts but the words need to be rendered seamlessly so as to make you unaware of them. None of the characters really seemed to care about each other--even Pilar and her grandmother, Celia, who supposedly have some sort of mythic spiritual/psychic connection, seem barely connected. Their relationship was supposed to be very strong yet it was weakly rendered.

Interestingly, what I most enjoyed about this book was a Q & A with the author at the end, where a lot of her sentiments about dealing with Cuban-American identity rang particularly true for me as a Cuban-American woman and writer. Perhaps she should write a book of essays about the subject, because she seems particularly eloquent as a nonfiction writer.

Another huge problem I have with this book, that I am just realizing, is that it's a book about Cuba and being Cuban, and yet Cuba does not at all feel like a character in this book. It just seems like a background setting. There is little description of it and little sense of what it really means to be Cuban. Any exile will tell you that their country is like a part of them, yet the scant attention paid to the Island itself was disappointing.

Would not recommend this book to readers looking for fiction on Cubans and Cuban-Americans, and will not re-read it a third time! Phew, two was enough.

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### **Esther says**

I did my senior thesis on this book, and I loved it. For those English and Spanish speakers. The relationships Christina Garcia creates between the different generations, and the circular motions in which she presents their stories and intertwines them is like poetry. And reading it in Spanish is even more poetic...though Garcia originally tried to write the novel in Spanish, and said she could not, and ended up writing it in English, I still think the translation is beautiful. I really enjoyed the book, and loved how the author obviously relates to Pilar and her plight, as well as taking a good look at Cuba. The politics of the book, though unpopular with many Cuban-Americans I am sure, show both sides pretty well. I really enjoyed the book.

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### **mark monday says**

*read during my AIG Years*

*I Remember*: a tale of a family during the Cuban Revolution... a focus on the voices of women... epic in scope, intimate in perspective... wonderfully differentiated characters, you really get to understand them, all about them, well beyond the politics - although the politics are central... gorgeous prose... warm and humanistic and full of love & anger & death & life.

must read this one again.

i originally read this so that i could have something literary to discuss with my very political roommate who worked at Global Exchange, an ardent feminist and a person who practically worshipped Cuba. turns out she scorned fiction and was only into non-fiction, so i ended up talking to myself about it. again. feh!

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### **Jamilla Rice says**

Dreaming in Cuban was a gem. I am glad that I forgot to return it to the library. If it weren't the last book that I had to return, I might never have read it. It reminds me a lot of Tan fiction: mothers and daughters lost in translation, with connections skipping generations.

It's also very lyrical and poetic, which would be pretty hard to escape considering the strong lyrical quality of the language. There was so much beauty, yet so much sadness.

I suppose it was mostly about separation: the physical separation/boundaries created between family members after the Cuban revolution and the emotional separation existing between mothers and daughters, fathers and sons, etc. So many women living such mournful lives, unloved by those who they most wanted to love them, yet denying that same love, keeping it from the children that needed it in order to break the cycle of loneliness and desperation. It is a "must-read."

#### Favorite/Memorable Quotes:

"Most of what I've learned that's important I've learned on my own, or from my grandmother." (28)

"I'm not too tired so I stay up reading the neon signs off the highway. The missing letters make for weird messages. There's a Shell station missing the "S." -hell Open 24 Hours (31)

"...their thoughts tumble together like gems in the polishing, reaching their hard conclusions." (46)

"The familiar is insistent and deadly." (99)

"believers can accomplish many things because the dead are benevolently inclined toward the living. On the other hand, nothing can be taken for granted because what the living desire will take great effort." (147)

"Maybe in the end the facts are not as important as the underlying truth she wants to convey. Telling her own truth is the truth to her, even if it's at the expense of chipping away our past." (177)

"Everything up until this very minute, as I sit at my desk on the second floor of Barnard library, looking out over a rectangle of dead grass, and beyond that, to the cars racing down Broadway, feels like a preparation for something. For what, I don't know. I'm still waiting for my life to begin." (179)

"For many years in Cuba, nobody spoke of the problem between blacks and whites. It was considered too disagreeable to discuss. But my father spoke to me clearly so that I would understand what happened to his father and his uncles during the Little War of 1912, so that I would know how our men were hunted down day and night like animals, and finally hung by their genitals from the lampposts in Guaimaro. The war that killed my grandfather and great-uncles and thousands of other blacks is only a footnote in our history books. Why, then, should I trust anything I read? I trust only what I see, what I know with my heart, nothing more." (185)

"My father used to say that there are forces in the universe that can transform our lives if only we surrendered ourselves." (186)

"Freedom, Abuela tells me, is nothing more than the right to a decent life." (233)

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### **Ryl says**

This is not just misery porn. It's feminist postcolonial multicultural misery porn which is somehow supposed to be better. But it isn't. It's just women being miserable because they won't get off their asses and do something about it. Pilar, the youngest woman followed in the novel, is supposed to be the hope of the future, but she's just as bad as all the rest. All of her references to the late 70's punk scene in New York start to sound a bit too researched after a while. She name-drops all the big bands: Lou Reed, The Ramones, Sex Pistols. Apparently Pilar never went to listen to a real underground band that never signed to a major record label. Oh, and she totally painted a picture that referenced the cover of Sex Pistols' "God Save the Queen" album cover a year before the album came out. What. The hell. Ever.

I liked Felicia a bit more, but I get the feeling that she was crazy simply because Great Literature requires a woman being driven crazy by her sexual desires that nice women don't have. García at first tries to blame this on syphilis, but then at the end Felicia dies of a mysterious unnamed illness that is quite clearly AIDS. Actually, what happens is that Felicia becomes Angel from *Rent* except she doesn't come back at the end and make it all better. Once she escaped from the book she stayed gone and good for her.

Lourdes is the only one who actually did have terrible things outside of her control happen to her, all it does is turn her into an evil bitch. Eventually she becomes a caricature merely to torment Pilar who can do no wrong because she's just, like, confused, man. Also Lourdes is **fat**, which is a horrible, horrible character flaw because fat women are gross. Again I say: What. The hell. Ever.

Celia might have been interesting if she had had any character development, but alas such was not the case. In the end she decided to follow her daughter Felicia's example and drown herself at the end of the novel. Again I say: Good for her.

Oh, and in case you missed the brickbat hitting you over the head, all men are evil and the source of all evil. Thank you and good night.

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### **Clif Hostetler says**

True to the title, this book is definitely Cuban and dreamy. The story follows three generations of Cuban women, jumping forward and backward in time, hopping back and forth between Cuba and New York, and switching between a variety of narrative styles (i.e. third person, first person, and epistolary). This variety in time, location, style and person contributes to the dreamy ambiance, but for me it was a bit nightmarish.

The human and family relationships in this story all seem afflicted with various strains caused by disease, mental illness, obsession, repression, hysteria ... etc. There's just too much dysfunctional family behavior, poor life choices and emotional unhappiness in this book for me. There's not a single romantic relationship in this book that is healthy and supportive.

All through the book I kept telling myself that if it doesn't have a coherent ending that wraps things up in a reasonable manner I'm going to give it a rating of one star. Well as it turns out that it did have a pretty good ending, so I'm giving it two stars. Actually, the last 20% of the book deserves five stars, but with the other 80% at one star the book averages out at two stars.

I experienced this book as an example of creative/experimental/MFA writing that went overboard to no purpose other than to show off writing skills and confuse the reader. It's the sort of book that gets assigned to

modern literature classes in order to torment the students.

However, upon finishing this book I see the completed story as a sad tragedy. (view spoiler) It's a story of dysfunctional relationships made worse by the political separations caused by the isolation of Communist Cuba from the USA. There are elements of Santería that appear throughout the novel.

The following quotation has special poignancy for me:

"Women who outlive their daughters are orphans, ... Only their granddaughters can save them, guard their knowledge like the first fire."

The following is a Wikipedia article about this book:

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dreaming...>

I found the Wikipedia article helpful in keeping characters straight.

An example of another book about three generations of women is *A Yellow Raft in Blue Water* by Michael Doris. In that book there is an "ah ha!" ending that provides an explanation of how and why craziness got passed from generation to generation.

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### **Claire McAlpine says**

Set against the background of the Cuban Revolution, Cristina García's *Dreaming in Cuban* is a story that spans three generations of women in the del Pino/Almeida family, highlighting the things that tie them together and those which push them apart.

The book opens with a vision of a man walking across water, a vision seen through a pair of binoculars, by Celia, the matriarchal grandmother. The man she sees is her ailing husband, Jorge del Pino who left for the United States four years earlier to seek medical attention. Observing the apparition, she understands that he has passed on.

Her daughter Lourdes from whom she is estranged and her granddaughter Pilar, with whom she communicates through a kind of telepathic relationship, live in America. Celia is pro the Castro regime while Lourdes abhors it. On opposite sides of the revolutionary fence, neither will budge in their views or actions, despite the consequent rupture in their relationship and the knock on effect it has for others in the family, forced to take sides.

Pilar understands her grandmother and hates that the mother and daughter's political beliefs prevent her from being closer to either of them. She rebels herself without knowing against what exactly, manifesting her discomfort with the world through impassioned artworks that initially disturb her mother and inspire harsh criticism, but which will eventually bring them closer together.

The past is also invoked through a series of letters written by Celia to Gustavo, the man she first loved, who it is revealed is not the man she married. Though none of these letters were ever sent, they continue to be written over the years, a place where Celia shares her innermost thoughts, desires and regrets.

Her second daughter Felicia never leaves Cuba, marries, has children and at a certain point becomes somewhat deranged, remarrying twice in quick succession, attracting tragedy from the moment of her second

marriage. She becomes deluded, seeks refuge in music and the Afro-Cuban cult of Santeria, becomes a priestess and loses herself completely.

Similarly to Edwidge Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, Cristina García explores themes of separation and identity, exile, the survival strategies of women and mother's and the long threads of cultural connection that continue to exist despite the miles that come to separate those who embrace them.

In literature, it tends to be referred to as magical realism, that occasional departure from the firm reality we are sure of, however it seems almost too easy to dismiss it as a literary device and ignore the connections between and within certain cultural traditions, where this ethereal communication between the living and the dead, those present and those who are not, exists alongside the more mundane communication we all indulge in.

I have noticed this tendency occurring in my recent reading of Jamaica Kincaid's *The Autobiography of My Mother*, Maryse Condé's *Victoire* Edwidge Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory* and Cristina García's work, writers from Antigua, Guadeloupe, Haiti and Cuba respectively and find it adds something essential and attractive to the narrative.

A brilliant addition to a growing collection of literature from this region, in a style I adore. A 5 star read for me. Highly recommended.

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### **Lila says**

What a delight to not only find an author who I'd never read before, but discover that she has many more books for me to read! I can't believe I never knew about her works before! I feel like I uncovered a treasure chest, a rich lush story that was so captivating that once I finished, I immediately reread it. And the best part, I read it while on vacation in Cuba!

The story follows the lives of 4 women; the grandmother who still lives in Cuba and believes in the revolution, her 2 daughters, one who stays in Cuba and is involved in the Santeria religion and the other who moved to New York, as well as her granddaughter, a rebellious teenager into abstract painting and punk rock. Although I enjoy many genre of literature, and the past 2 years I've discovered contemporary fantasy, Magical realism is still will always be my favourite.

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### **Kathleen says**

I am in awe of what Garcia can create with language. This is one of the most inventive books I have ever read. Unfortunately the structure was a little too inventive for me. The back and forth between characters, points of view and timeframes caused me to lose track and lose momentum for the story. She created so many bizarre characters and situations in glorious, precise detail that I wanted to spend more time with each of them but their vividness vanished when I turned the page to find another one waiting for me.

But the color—both literal and figurative! There was an abundance of assaults, gruesome goat heads, a fantastic Ferris wheel accident, and for some reason, my favorite image was probably Jorge's electric brooms swinging round and round in the air.

It sounds funny, but it wasn't. There was a sadness to the story—that special family kind of melancholy that comes from hopes and regrets and the never-ending tragedies that tie us together.

*“Until I returned to Cuba, I never realized how many blues exist.”* Blues of all kinds.

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### **Chrissie says**

I had started this, but had been forced to put it aside before reading all of it. Now I have gone back to it. I love the lines. I enjoy the mixture of fact and fiction. The fictional aspect allows the author to play with the details, descriptions and words. The author is a poet with her words. Originally she had planned this to be a poem! I have returned right smack to the beginning. I probably would have forgotten parts, and I don't want to miss anything. This is too good a book for that.

It is about the consequences of the Cuban Revolution, how it played out on its people. It is the story of a Cuban family, divided by politics and geography.

This is a must read if you enjoy magical realism.

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### **karen says**

I am reading this but feel 80% sure I've read it before. This is because I have either a.read it before or b. it is so very similar to her other book the Aguero Sisters. I will determine upon completion.

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Upon completion I am still only 80% sure I've read this before. Perhaps I merely dreamed it.

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### **Brina says**

I have been reading magical realism for over twenty years when I first discovered Latin American women writers such as Isabel Allende, Julia Alvarez, and Cristina García. As I have read and reread their books over the years, I have garnered an appreciation for the genre that flows so well through their culture. Beginning with One Hundred Years of Solitude fifty years ago, magical realism inserted into novels includes scenes such as blood flowing down the street, conversing with the spirits at a three-legged table, and the ashen remains of a man blowing north. I had not read Dreaming in Cuban for nearly twenty years and my memories of this sensuous novel had faded, so, when I noticed a paperback copy on my parents' bookshelf, I decided to reintroduce myself to Cristina García's writing.

Prior to Castro's revolution, Cuba, Havana especially, rivaled Miami as a steamy vacation hotspot gateway to Latin America. In the 1930s Celia del Pino falls for a Spanish guitarist named Gustavo who had come to Cuba to visit. Although married, he promises Celia that he would leave his wife and children should she decide to follow him to Spain; yet, Franco took over the Iberian Peninsula and the state of Cuban affairs deteriorated with the start of the worldwide depression, and Celia's dreams never materialized. She ended up choosing the easy road and married Jorge del Pino, who would father her three children: Lourdes, Felicia, and Javier; however, her love for Gustavo never wavered, and on the eleventh of each month, Celia

continued to write him a love letter for the next twenty five years. As a result, it easily became apparent that she did not demonstrate love for her children fathered by a man other than Gustavo, and her relationships with them faltered long before they reached adulthood.

Garcia tells this story from many points of view including Celia, Lourdes, Felicia, and their children Pilar and Ivanito. Although a story of unfulfilled love, the novel centers around the 1959 revolution and how each member of the family copes with it. Celia and her husband Jorge chose to remain in Cuba close to the sea because a Santera predicted that that is where she should live out her days. Felicia and her family stayed behind as well, yet, her children ended up in boarding school as their mother suffered from mental blackouts and could not properly care for them. Lourdes as a result of her mother not loving her as a child fled to New York immediately and became the proprietress of the Yankee Doodle Bakery, a proud American and embarrassed when she saw a Cuban voicing their support of Castro. As the oldest grandchild, Pilar would have rather stayed behind in Cuba and ends up rebelling against her mother in similar ways that Lourdes acted out against Celia. The family's history ended up cyclical in nature, as all roads lead back to Cuba by the sea.

I am used to magical realism saturating the writing of Latina writers. While this novel contains elements, it is not contained throughout. Some instances include Lourdes communicating with her father Jorge long after his death, which I found touching, and Felicia turning an ex-husband into ashes with no recollections of her own. The magical realism here is mainly in the form of the African Santeria religion found in Cuba, that Felicia was attracted to from the time she was a girl. The rest of the family found her to be crazy, but I thought that Felicia brought some character to the Cuban branch of the family, especially when her diet consisted solely of coconut ice cream and plantains. Later, Pilar, who chose to be a painter, found Santeria attractive, and chose to follow some of its basic tenets as well. While not as obvious as magical realism found in other books that I have read, I did enjoy how magic brought this sometimes crazy family together during trying times.

Like Allende, Garcia's writing features strong female protagonists in a machismo culture in the forms of Lourdes, Felicia, Pilar, and to a certain extent Celia. All the women of the del Pino family exhibited strength even if they were said to be crazy by outsiders. Reading a novel containing high levels of magical realism is always a joy for me, as I read fast to see what magic the author decides to employ next. Dreaming in Cuban has been a fun journey through 20th century Cuba, and I hope to read another of Garcia's books King of Cuba, which is said to feature both magical realism and cameo appearances by both members of the del Pino family and key figures in 20th century Latino culture. As summer starts to wind down, rereading a favorite book of the magical realism genre is always a thrill as I rate Dreaming in Cuban 4 stars.

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## **Olivia says**

I've long been fascinated by Cuba. The country has a rich history with a very beautiful landscape. When I saw that this book was a must read for anyone interested in Cuba or Cuban history I absolutely knew I had to pick it up.

In all honesty I was just downright dissapointed. While Garcia's writing style isn't horrible, it is still far from great in my opinion. The sentence structure is choppy and I could tell the author had trouble conveying any coherent idea. Most of the sentences in my opinion were so full of fluff and unnecessary wording. I actually wonder how any publisher could approve of this.

The story alternates from the perspective of several people in a large Cuban family. When an author has so many characters, it is their duty to give each character a unique voice so the reader can differentiate them. Garcia did not do this. At all. I had to flip back and forth several times just to remember who was speaking. A woman in her 70s should not have the same voice as a teenage boy. (Side note: I've read various interviews with different authors and many of them state how they really had to work hard in order to do this so I know it can be done.) Finally, the characters themselves are just so unlikable. Few of them have any redeeming qualities and because of this I just didn't care what happened to them.

So, between the horrible sentence structure, the lack of distinct voices and awful characters. Just leave this one on the shelf.

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### **Natalia Sylvester says**

In interviews I'm often asked what books shaped me the most, so I've decided to start a shelf where I write about the books that left an impact early in life. *Dreaming in Cuban* by Cristina Garcia is the first that came to mind.

I was in high school when I first heard of it, a freshman in English class. My teacher had photocopied the first chapter. It began:

"Celia del Pino, equipped with binoculars and wearing her best housedress and drop pearl earrings, sits in her wicker swing guarding the north coast of Cuba."

That one line could carry so much—character, setting, ambience, suspense—is a testament to Garcia's incredible writing. And the name, Celia del Pino...I'd grown up in the Miami public school system and had gone this long (until 9th grade!) never having read book about Latinas, written by a Latina.

This is a multi-generational story about the Cuban Revolution, portrayed through four women—mothers, daughters, sisters, grandmothers—who are all deeply connected through memory and their ties to Cuba, but separated by time, space, and life. At a sentence level, Garcia's writing reads like poetry, with unexpected leaps of language that give the narrative a magical feel. But step back and she creates a world that juxtaposes the lost paradise of Cuba with the nostalgia-filled island that still lives in the hearts of those in exile.

Years later, I revisited *Dreaming in Cuban* as a sophomore in college. I was majoring in Creative Writing with a concentration in poetry.

I can still picture the moment I turned the last page of this novel. I was sitting in my bedroom, in my parents' house, on an oversized couch in the corner of my room that served as a reading nook. Though I'd read the last lines, I couldn't close the book. I wanted to stay in Garcia's world a little longer. I wanted to keep spending time with the characters, and even the next day, and the next after that, I found myself missing them, hung over from the book's language and imagery.

The next day, during my fiction class at the University of Miami, I told my professor that I'd be switching my concentration from poetry to fiction. She was thrilled, and when she asked why, I said, "I just finished reading a book that I didn't want to end. I didn't want to let go of the characters and the world. I want to do that someday."

She high-fived me. That's how I began writing fiction.

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