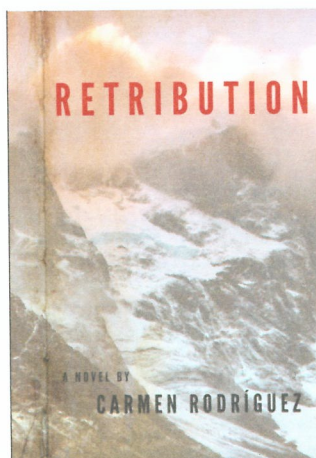




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All over the world, people are resisting vicious regimes, regimes that just might track them down, torture, and murder them for their actions. These people make choices that truly put their safety, sanity, and lives—and that of their families—on the line. What motivates them to take such unthinkable risks? How do they cope with the ensuing scars and rage even if they survive terrifying ordeals? And how can they possibly explain their decisions to future, presumably safe generations?

These are only some of the questions the novel *Retribution* explores through three generations of Chilean women, women whose chances of leading blithely secure lives end when the Pinochet coup storms Santiago in 1973.

Opening with lines from Christina Peri Rossi, “For sure our revenge will be love . . . in spite of everything,” readers learn exactly what “in spite of everything” means. We learn that Tania, the granddaughter, raised and living in Vancouver in 2011, has been asked for a DNA sample to determine if her biological father is the man who tortured and raped her mother, Soledad, a student activist during the coup. We witness how that sanctioned terror shatters Soledad’s life, how she searches futilely for her husband, how she endures “the grill” beside her best friend. We watch as

her mother, Sol, fatally welcomes the rise of Pinochet and dismisses her son and daughter as communists. We realize that when the black shirts bash into Sol’s home to seize her son, she will need to forgive and love herself again, too.

What “love” encompasses, especially a mother’s love, is also covered—and challenged. Finding refuge in Canada,

Retribution
by Carmen Rodríguez

Women’s Press Literary, 2011
352 pp; \$22.95

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these mothers are constantly cooking and sewing, singing and story-telling; but Soledad remains politically active, even returning to Chile in 1986 to help the resistance movement once again. Within her actions lies a clear message: In a world of corrupt leaders a mother’s love should also include—must also include—political dissent. This isn’t a mother’s usual territory in *machista* Chile, nor in Canada, where well-ordered lists and comfortable lives reign.

Yet *Retribution* is more than about surviving Pinochet. While Tania’s anxieties about her family’s brutal Chilean history and her mother’s on-going resistance frame the novel, it also delves into her grandmother and mothers’ accounts of their lives in pre-coup Chile. Although psychological depth is often sacrificed here, the stories of Sol and Soledad’s friends and lovers, their education and aspirations, their weddings and journeys, contain much laughter and lyricism. More tellingly, these stories also explore the fair amount of pain within everyday lives, stressing that the ignorance and hostilities that riddle families and societies must also be transcended.

It takes decades for the trio to earn their retribution, to love and define their lives despite the scars. However, when Soledad returns to Chile in 2011 to collect her husband’s recently located remains, she is still wary: “Who is who?” she wonders as she rides the new train. And more disturbingly, at a lodge, as her naive, righteous young hostess extolls the late Pinochet’s presidential virtues, Soledad wonders, “How does a country continue living when a good chunk of the population thinks and feels like that?” Chile, like so many countries, will have to rely on the people who confront regimes regardless of the terror they know awaits them. »