

Dear Emily & Melanie,

This week I read *Lobizona* by Romina Garber and I have SO MUCH TO SAY! I think this has made it in my top 5 most favorite books ever, and I cannot help but say it's because there is a main character named Catalina (never happened before!) and it's based on Argentine culture. If I was ever going to write a Fantasy Fiction novel, I would have written this book. I have some surface level comments as well as SO many comments about the usefulness of the text as a human and for students. I couldn't put the book down, so yes, I am indeed turning in my last QCQC a week early.

First, I'll start with the more surface ideas that I loved. First of all, it referenced things from my life that no one else ever knows unless I'm in Argentina like chimichurri, Argentine kool-aid *aka mate* - a staple at my house (120), affectionate greetings (118), a game of chinchón (23), Don Quijote, Borges, La Guerra Sucia and the words boludo, che & vos. I was legitimately shocked everytime I read one of these things in a book.

Also, after reading the author's note, I recognize why I connected so much with the book. Garber's parents left Argentina because of the Guerra Sucia, which my dad also lived through in Argentina. The feelings that the main character expressed based on the immigrant status with parents living through this terror resonated with me, a little more than I'm even comfortable with (lol). Also, there were little references to familiar and unfamiliar things throughout the book such as Harry Potter and *The Handmaid's Tale*. I liked how things really seemed to combine things that are familiar to me, like the labyrinth. This part of the novel really reminded me of the room of requirement in Harry Potter but with twists of Borges who wrote about the labyrinth. On this note, there were traces of Borges in other things that Manu experiences on her journey (like meeting her past self, and the living library in the tree...very Borges-esque), "'We're in a vast and seemingly unending library lined with wall-to-wall books. The fact that it's inside a tree makes it somewhat cannibalistic'" (Garber 2020, p.115). Also, the conversation Manu has with her Mom is a conversation I've had with my dad about HP many times, "name one Latino character, and I'll read it" (Garber 2020, p.28). And Manu's dislike of Mate, which is a major decoration factor of my house in Louisville (mate cups cover my house) is so similar. I am half-disowned for struggling with drinking mate like Manu, "I seal up the bag of yerba on the counter and make my best effort not to cringe at the bitter herbal smell of the drink that's as sacred to Argentines as dulce de leche" (Garber 2020, p.17). Honestly Romina Garber seems like the Latina and much more linguistically creative and multi-culturally celebratory J. K. Rowling. I would read 7 of these books, and I'm so glad to know that there is another book to follow up with. I want to be friends with Romina because she is an older version of me.

Now, onto more serious topics covered in the novel. This text really played with duality and intersectionality in a way that reminded me of Gloria Anzald a. Manu is constantly talking about being a hybrid, a *mezcla*, which Anzald a covers a lot in her

discussion of being Chicanx. I would put these two authors in a book group together. On this note, there were a lot of shifting dualities between queer theory and feminism. The novel spoke about gendering and expectations of women, such as fertility, “Anyone who doesn’t have children-whether by choice is infertility or whatever-can be arrested” (Garber 2020, p.332). Even the flower that helps with postpartum and the fact that “a bruja can only give birth two or three times in her lifetime, and after each baby is born, she loses her abilities” (Garber 2020, p.172). Even within this, we first enter the novel discussing menstruation which NEVER happens nor does it ever get taken into SUCH AN INTERESTING CONVERSATION!!! It felt ridiculously empowering. I loved how Garber approached these topics and even brought up the biggest struggle of intersectionality in my opinion so far. Manu says that “Gender equality and freedom of lifestyle are battles I can’t take on yet, because first I need to win a different war: The right to exist” (Garber 2020, p.324). This is a quote I’ll take with me a long time. The conversation surrounding Manu’s belonging is so intriguing throughout the novel as Garber plays with the idea of undocumented in two different realms. It really makes the reader question “legality” in the country versus belonging somewhere. Manu has neither for most of the novel. Through this conversation, Garber parallels ICE with the cazadores and names the word that hurts so many, illegal (Garber 2020, p.128) even joking “believe it or not, it’s still easier to pin my hopes on being a bruha than a US citizen” (Garber 2020, p.199). We always end up talking about how novels may make a student feel in the classroom but this novel seems like such a good thing to do in class. It really positions things in a very healthy way that would help students process identity. There is so much naming, hiding and lack of definition that I love the discussion on, ““If there’s no word in any known vocabulary to encapsulate me, that just means language can’t define me. A label can’t hold me. I’m beyond classification. I’m an original” (Garber 2020, p.382). Similarly, Manu says “I’m a passenger not just in this vehicle, but in my body, in this country, in my life. Defined by decisions I didn’t make. My undocumented status” it really reminded me of Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of Universe and I wanted them to be Lobizones in this story (Garber 2020, p.83).

I have a lot more to say, but I will focus on language as an end to this letter. I really appreciated how Garber used multilingualism in the novel. Different from Anzald a, Garber doesn’t purposefully leave out the reader (sort of as a lesson) but instead finds creative ways to bring the reader in and translate. Although, there still are many things that would not be understood by the monolingual USAmerican without context for Argentine culture (I’m going to make a big assumption that most people in the US don’t know how to play chinch n, drink mate each day or know how to use the vos form in Spanish. These are truly Argentine things!). I also loved the descriptive

language as a English teacher, it was captivating, ““There’s the golden grass that ticks off time by turning silver as the day ages; the black-leafed trees that can cry up storms, their dewdrop tears rolling down their bark to form rivers the colorful waterfalls that warn onlookers of oncoming danger; the hope-sucking Sombras that dwell in darkness” (Garber 2020, p.11). I love the idea that “when someone deviates from an accepted norm, they signal a gap in the system. A hole that hasn’t been plugged. The danger with exposing a foundation’s failure is it opens the door to the possibility that it’s a faulty structure altogether and should be torn down and build anew” (Garber 2020 p.233). So many good quotes in this one!

A little list of other quotes I loved:

- “If you’re undocumented, you’re unwritten” (273)
- “Go forth and shatter every convention” (236)
- First of us to be born outside her cage (312) - Maya Angelou Vibes!
- “No matter how many borders we cross, we can’t seem to outrun the fear of not feeling safe in our own homes” (2)
- “Hide, be invisible, take up as little space as possible” (57)
- “You’re powerful because you’re one of a kind.” (74)
- “Attention breeds scrutiny. Silence is your salvation. Discovery = Deportation. Death” (321)
- “You’ve never been excluded from anything because the world is designed for you” (375)
- “Plant your new garden with the seeds of equality, water it with tolerance and empathy, and warm it with the temperate heat of truth” (377)

A few final questions to finish out my QCQC would be: What is the importance of all the symbols throughout the novel? In the end, it feels like there is much more left to think about with the zs and 7s and ms? Which of the folktales are actually based on Argentine folklore? Does Jazm n have any redeeming qualities or she actually just a Professor Umbridge? So many more...

Best! & thank you for a great semester of reading that I actually enjoyed,
Catalina