

## READING GROUP GUIDE

### COCKFIGHT

María Fernanda Ampuero  
translated by Frances Riddle

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1. One of *Cockfight's* epigraphs—“Everything that rots forms a family.”—comes from the poem “Hace algún tiempo” (“Some time ago”) by Argentinian poet, narrator, essayist, and journalist Fabián Casas. Why do you think Ampuero chose to include this quote in the book’s epigraph? What kinds of *rotting* do we see in Ampuero’s collection, both literally and figuratively? Why does Ampuero establish the motif of rot and decay, and what function does it serve?
2. Where in these stories are the animal body and the human body juxtaposed or placed in opposition, and where are the boundaries between them challenged or blurred? Why does Ampuero play with this animal/human duality, and what effect does it have on the stories?
3. In “Auction,” the narrator is called “a monster” (6); in “Ali,” Miss Ali is “turned into such a monster” (91); and in “Monsters,” the narrator is described as “a beast of a sister, a girl so unlike a girl, so wild” (15). In the logic of these stories, what makes a woman a monster? What are the political implications of referring to women as monsters?
4. “Pups,” “Blinds,” and “Nam” all explore the idea of youth and burgeoning sexuality within a familial context. Does Ampuero’s choice to frame sexuality within the context of the family disrupt or complicate ideas of property, genealogies, offspring, power, and ideologies of gender and sexuality? If so, how?
5. “You should have faith, he told Marta, faith, before disappearing into the desert. The word tasted like shit on her tongue” (77). The theme of *faith* permeates the stories “Christ,” “Passion,” and “Mourning.” What does it mean to have faith as a woman, and what do these stories imply about biblical figures (that is, who are we putting our faith *in*)? What is Ampuero’s intention in retelling the stories of Jesus Christ (“Passion”) and Lazarus of Bethany (“Mourning”)?
6. How do “Ali,” “Coro,” and “Bleach” each explore class tensions and class traumas? What methods do the affluent women in these stories use to avoid “see[ing] themselves” (98) and the suffering around them? What are the stakes involved in maintaining appearances, and how do lower-class women suffer as a result?

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7. When the narrator looks at Diana's family photos in "Nam," she notices that something about the images seems off. "Maybe [it's] everything that isn't pictured," she conjectures (26). In *Cockfight*, many things are similarly cut off, only hinted at, or left unsaid. Why does the Ampuero leave some things to the imagination and describe others in horrifying detail, and what effect does that contrast have?
8. How and where does machismo appear in these stories? How does it serve as an agent of horror within the collection, and what implications does that have for the horror genre? How does the positionality of Latinx men and the shadow of colonialism impact machismo both in these stories and in general? Is machismo itself a response to oppression and marginalization—the manifestation of structural violence—or is its source solely patriarchal?
9. The synopsis for *Cockfight* on the book's back cover describes the stories' characters as "spend[ing] their lives trapped reenacting their past traumas." Do you agree with that assessment? How might the final story, "Other," disrupt those patterns of reenactment? Do you find the ending of the story hopeful or foreboding, and why?

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