

READING GROUP GUIDE

FIEBRE TROPICAL by Julián Delgado Lopera

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1. How does Francisca's perspective limit the way we experience her world? In what ways is she a reliable narrator and in what ways is she an unreliable one?
2. The title of *Fiebre Tropical* comes from Francisca's observation of the intense rain and humidity in Miami: "Lluvia tropical is nature's violence. And here it was a lluvia tropical on acid, a fiebre tropical" (19). Vivid descriptions of the weather recur throughout the novel, from the rain that threatens to interrupt Sebastián's baptism to the storms "overflowing the streets to sea proportions" in Myriam's Bogotá (156). How does the weather in this novel, particularly the rain, link the past with the present, Florida with Colombia? Is the lluvia tropical in Miami different from the rain in Bogotá? How?
3. How does the Martínez Juan family's story uphold or challenge the dominant narrative about migration and movement? Francisca spends much of the novel in transit and fantasizes about the "possibility of escape, a one-way ticket" (189). What is she trying to leave behind? Why?
4. The book begins with the baptism of a dead baby, Francisca's would-be brother, although his character is not mentioned for the remainder of the novel. How does this baptism function as an introduction to Francisca's experience of Miami and her family relationships?
5. Radionovelas, telenovelas, and TV shows are significant sources of entertainment for many of the characters in the novel, particularly La Tata. At the beginning of *Fiebre Tropical*, Francisca describes La Tata's efforts to be invited onto *Sábado Gigante* after arriving in Miami (25); toward the end, she envisions herself and Carmen appearing on *Caso Cerrado* after watching an episode featuring two female ex-lovers (241). How does television function as an escape, become a space for self-invention, or mirror the insecurities and aspirations of the characters in the novel?
6. Wilson and Pablito present the reader with two visions of adolescent masculinity. How are their relationships with Francisca different? Religion is a major part of Wilson's life, but not Pablito's. What effect do faith and disbelief have on the way they relate to women and the world?

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7. How do the flashback chapters contribute to the story? In what ways did the different environments in which La Tata, Mami, and Francisca grew up affect their attitudes toward family, sex, and womanhood? As teenagers, Mami was a cutthroat businesswoman and La Tata was a passive daydreamer. How have they changed? What about their adolescent selves is still in evidence as they navigate their new lives in Miami?
8. Although *Fiebre Tropical* is primarily a realistic novel, the narrative at times takes advantage of lyrical and fantastical imagery, such as this passage from Alba's girlhood: "Alba crawled around the house . . . swimming deep into the soil, deeper into the soil, watching some of the horse's bones go by, skeletons of children, a lost shoe, emeralds gleaming cutting pieces from her arms that quickly regrew, she swayed from side to side with her mouth open, eating fresh dirt, swallowing fresh dirt, bathing in its misty coolness" (210). What do you make of this moment? How does it complicate your understanding of the narrative voice of the novel, or the versions of "truth" that the narrator presents to us?
9. When Carmen returns to Miami at the end of the novel, Francisca believes that she looks different: she observes that "Even underneath her shekina dress I could tell her boobs were much bigger and I wondered if she'd gotten a boob job in Medellín," and later notices that her nose appears changed as well (283). Do you think that Carmen got plastic surgery in Colombia? If so, why? If not, why does Francisca assume that she has?
10. The entire novel is narrated to a female listener who is never named. Who do you think is listening to Francisca's story?

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