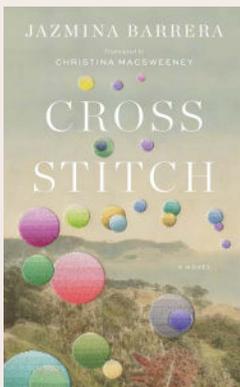


## CROSS-STITCH

Jazmina Barrera, translated from Spanish by Christina MacSweeney

1. As young girls, the narrator Mila and her friend Citlali write a novel about a girl whose magical thread leads wherever she wishes, even to her best friend's killer. Is this fictional novel a metaphor for *Cross-Stitch*? What does the narrator wish for, and what does she find through the threads of the story?
2. What is *Cross-Stitch*'s relationship to time, especially the experience of time following loss? How does the novel organize its various pasts—of memory, needlework, and language?
3. Early on the narrator notes two translations of the same phrase: “A woman’s place is at her embroidery,” and “A woman’s place is on the edge of the abyss” (pg. 8). How does *Cross-Stitch* use embroidery to challenge and expand what “a woman’s place” is? Beyond its connection to the feminine ideal, what subversive histories of embroidery does the novel excavate?
4. A tale of female friendship, *Cross-Stitch* narrates a coming of age through books, music, art, and travel. How do these objects and experiences inform the girls’ ideas of who they are and who they will become?
5. The cause of Citlali’s death is never clarified, but the novel portrays a steady undertow of sexual harassment from male friends, teachers, lovers, and strangers. How are the three female characters affected by growing up in this patriarchal atmosphere?
6. *Cross-Stitch* quotes Margo Glantz’s observation that women’s writing contains the “cadences” and “shuttling rhythm” of stitching (pg. 125). In the novel these include working on an embroidery project, putting it away for a while, then returning to it, and the intimacy of childhood friendship, growing apart in adulthood, and reuniting through tragedy. How do these rhythms affect the book’s construction and how the plot develops?
7. Embroidery samplers are important objects in the novel, especially Citlali’s arachniary and its weave of spiders, leaves, clouds, and other natural elements. What does the arachniary communicate about Citlali’s interests and interiority? What significance does it have for her friends who survive her?
8. The narrator says that women’s writing, contrary to the male canon’s obsession with originality, often “borrow[s] the words of other women” either for help expressing ideas or for sheer pleasure (pg. 126). How does *Cross-Stitch* invite other women’s voices into its pages, and what effect does this have on the narrative?



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For more information, contact Kelsey McFaul:  
[kelsey@twolinespress.com](mailto:kelsey@twolinespress.com)

Two Lines Press | San Francisco, CA  
[twolinespress.com](http://twolinespress.com)

