

## THE QUEEN OF SWORDS

Jazmina Barrera, translated from Spanish by Christina MacSweeney

1. *Queen of Swords* presents Elena Garro as an underrecognized, even forgotten, female writer. What does the book suggest is responsible for this lack of recognition?
2. Barrera writes that “no life fits in a single book” (pg.10). What source materials does Barrera draw on as she writes? What decisions does she make about what to include, or not?
3. What genre is *Queen of Swords*: a biography, a detective story, a ghost story, a combination of these, or something else altogether?
4. How does the book represent the relationship between Elena Garro and Octavio Paz? What revisions does it suggest to Paz’s legacy?
5. The Spanish newspaper *El Mundo* has called Elena Garro “the cursed mother of magical realism.” What insight does *Queen of Swords* offer about Garro’s relationship to magical realism, to Gabriel García Márquez, and to other Spanish writers of her generation? Why is she “cursed”?
6. Barrera is deeply curious about the many unknowable details of Elena Garro’s life. What (perhaps unconventional) methods does she use in her search for clarity, and what insights do they provide?
7. How does *Queen of Swords* navigate Elena Garro’s controversial qualities and the dark periods of her life? In what ways is Garro representative of her time, and how does she push against societal restrictions on women?
8. Elena Garro was born and lived much of her life in Mexico, but she also spent many years outside it. What was her relationship to Mexico? What insights does her life provide about the experience of living and writing in exile?



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