

Lizards at Large: A Critique

Lizards at Large is a delightful yet profound story. A satire in the form of a comic, the story is a critique on the intellectual and political situation of Claremont Daycare, where the story takes place, an allusion, no doubt, to the Claremont Colleges. As a debut creation for an otherwise inexperienced artist, the art and design is impressive, particularly for its meticulous attention to details and ubiquitous attempts at referencing the colleges. The story itself also offers a multitude of possibilities for interpretation.

From the perspective of Bo, the protagonist, the narrative is a coming of age story. Bo, the typical anti-hero character, is a 5-year-old boy who doesn't appear to have any defining characteristics besides the fact that he likes ants. Initially nonchalant to lizards, Bo gains an interest in the issue through a forum hosted by the daycare, where kids speak passionately about the issue from different perspectives. A few weeks later, Bo notices that the lizards seemed to have disappeared, and soon realizes that he is the only one who remembers about their existence and cares about where they have gone. Through searching and doubt, Bo gradually develops an affinity for lizards, resolving to learn more about them as he moves across the world to attend elementary school. His conviction is confirmed in the final scene, as a lizard appears under his bed on his last day in Claremont. Although possible interpretations are manifold, the story focuses mainly on how an issue, in this case, that of lizards, is dealt with in the Claremont community. On the

surface, there is the unfeeling intellectualization, the sympathetic concern, the defensive accusation, and the uncompromising demands, as well as endless debate, and yet, no one takes the time to fully understand the issue. When serious criticism addressed in sophisticated language is juxtaposed with the comic's simple, doodle-y style, the effect is comical. Though the speakers of the forum are purportedly five- or six-years- olds, they speak with the maturity and eloquence of educated young adults, obviously a satire to the latter. Much as the artist is frugal with her strokes, she takes full advantage of the readers' ability of closure, especially with the character's facial expressions, which convey rich emotion despite their stylistic simplicity. The artist seems also fully conscious of the freedom she is afforded by this medium, and rarely squanders an opportunity to render her images and text in unconventional ways, with frames flowing seamlessly into each other, and texts cramped in awkward margins. Wherever possible, the artist takes the chance to poke fun at unique aspects of Claremont, such as the stereotypes as represented by the forum speakers, each which an intricately crafted profile, as well as the architecture, temperature, and roaming creatures of the area. It is certainly no coincidence that the podium looks the way it does, a sign of the artist paying homage to her alma mater. Examples of such abound, even including a cryptic reference to the mysterious number that is left as an exercise for the astute reader. The consistent attention to detail as exemplified in these designs is proof of effort and devotion to the story and its presentation.

Through noticing the disappearance of lizards and undertaking the quest of looking for them, the protagonist takes part in the not so uncommon trope of an

everyman becoming the hero. Bo is reminiscent of Berenger in Ionesco's *Rhinoceros*, who remains the only human on earth as every one else transforms into rhinoceroses, and becomes the savior of mankind. It is unclear, until the end of the story, whether Bo will, like Berenger, become a savior of Claremont in some way, but he certainly has that potential. Moreover, it is also unclear what the significance of the lizard appearing in the final scene is, though possibilities are plenty. Indeed, many questions remain unanswered, perhaps even for the artist: what do the lizards represent? Where have they gone, and why? Are there lizards on the other side of the world? In every way, the ending of the story invites a sequel that the artist may consider creating, if she should have the leisure. Nevertheless, the story is also well disposed to be interpreted as self-contained. As previously discussed, the appearance of the lizard at the end heroifies the protagonist, and concludes his story, at least temporarily, in Claremont. What happens next is a new chapter.