Un hombre llamado lobo
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The action is set in two time periods: present day and around 1990, in Buenos Aires, Patagonia and Buenos Aires Province. The action is related in the third person, by a more or less omniscient narrator.

We begin in the present day with an introduction to Ivan Lobo, a 19 year old adolescent who lives with his surly, unloving grandmother in a small house in a poor Buenos Aires suburb. Ivan is a listless, melancholy youth with very little experience of life. His mother, Estela, died of cancer a few months before and he is browbeaten by his grandmother, who makes no secret of the burden he is to her. He is haunted by the vague idea of his father, who apparently abandoned the family when he was a baby.

A dishevelled old man, Marcusse, visits the house asking for Estela and Ivan. Marcusse tells Ivan that it wasn't his father's fault that he never knew him,that in fact Estela was the one who left – he knows this because nineteen years ago he tried to help his father find them both. He has recently come across an advert of a car for sale placed by one Silvio Lobo who is apparently living in a village a few hours away from Buenos Aires. To the grandmother's delight, Ivan and Marcusse agree to set out in search of the missing father.

The book is written in a simple, almost terse style (this was a great relief; I once had to translate a sizeable extract by this author for an anthology and the language was so intricate and florid that I ended up wanting to throttle him). It features elements of noire and even western literature, full of gruff dialogue and bleak thoughts. The only exception is Marcusse, whose theories about life and chance, and reports on his investigation, inject urgency and colour into proceedings. In spite of this, the plot actually moves along fairly quickly with new twists, characters and set-pieces introduced at regular intervals, whilst the narrator leavens the tone slightly with subtle irony. The characters, with the possible exception of Marcusse, are thoroughly unlovable; it's as though someone has hoovered up all the empathy, love and understanding going in Argentina, leaving only apathy, impotence and submissiveness. Silvio is a particularly pathetic piece of work – but neither are the women who abandon him, Estela and Celeste, blessed with outstanding qualities. Ivan is very much his father's son, a self-imposed victim of circumstance. The language is straightforward and could be easily rendered into English by a good translator.

I very much enjoyed this book. It has a melancholy, amusing charm, and its takes on masculine archetypes, parenthood, hope, exile, loss etc. are both original and quietly powerful. The author never lets things get too depressing, offering glimmers of redemption or absurd moments to puncture the sense of gloom. Overall, I would say that this is an excellent work of contemporary literature, but *apart* from that might struggle to set pulses racing.

This is a summary of the report by Kit Maude