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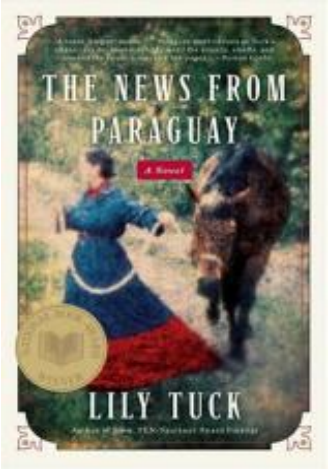
The News from Paraguay: A Novel

by Lily Tuck



About the Book

The year is 1854. In Paris, Francisco Solano -- the future dictator of Paraguay -- begins his courtship of the young, beautiful Irish courtesan Ella Lynch with a poncho, a Paraguayan band, and ahorse named Mathilde. Ella follows Franco to Asunción and reigns there as his mistress. Isolated and estranged in this new world, she embraces her lover's ill-fated imperial dream -- one fueled by a heedless arrogance that will devastate all of Paraguay.

With the urgency of the narrative, rich and intimate detail, and a wealth of skillfully layered characters, **The News from Paraguay** recalls the epic novels of Gabriel García Márquez and Mario Vargas Llosa.

Discussion Guide

1. How does the sexuality in the book mirror the story of Franco and Paraguay's development? What are some of the ways in which the romantic love between Ella and Franco reflect the story of Lopez the dictator and his quest to dominate South America? What about the later sexual encounters in the book? In what way do they symbolize the realities of Franco's war and the demise of his authority and country?

2. Even as a mistress, Ella is a powerful and commanding presence in Paraguay's domestic and military affairs. Where does she figure in the pantheon of "the women behind the men?" (Jacqueline Kennedy, Eleanor Roosevelt, Eva Peron.) Are there common qualities that seem to exist in them? If so, what are they? Why are women of powerful men so fascinating? In what ways is she more powerful than Franco?

3. It seems as though Ella loves her mare Mathilde more than Franco, more than any country she may call home, more than her children. What purpose does the horse serve in her life? Is there some tenderness or vulnerability she can only express to an animal? How do the other animals in the book reveal something of their owner?

4. Ella and Franco are both complex people, at turns affectionate and happy, at turns greedy and brutal. What are some examples of Ella and Franco at their best? Their worst? Are they essentially good people?

5. Life is surprisingly tenuous and violent in the wild, undeveloped Paraguay of the 1800s. Ella's baby girl dies of crib death and another baby boy dies after being born premature, the bloody amputation of Marie's arm which results in her death, the self-induced abortion of Dona Dolores, the thousands of deaths in the war, many by starvation and disease, the raping of young Guarani girls that take place in Inocencia's former bed. Did you find the violence in the book shocking, and how does this affect Ella?

6. Ella adapts well to Paris from Ireland, to Paraguay, to new languages, new people. Franco, on the other hand, does not adapt well to change and does not ultimately survive. Why? Discuss why Franco does not alter his plans for the country and the war when things start to go badly.

7. Has Ella's character changed by the time she has returned to Paris and is living in poverty? When she sits in her room and sees the ghosts from her past, is she satisfied with the life she has had or are the visions of people from her past an indication that she is haunted by memories, disturbed by regrets?

8. At the end of his life, has Franco gone crazy or is he merely seeing to the very end his thwarted, insatiable ambition?

Author Bio

Lily Tuck, the winner of the National Book Award for THE NEWS FROM PARAGUAY, is the author of eight novels, three short story collections and a biography of Elsa Morante. The recipient of a Guggenheim fellowship, she lives in New York.

Critical Praise

"Charming."

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