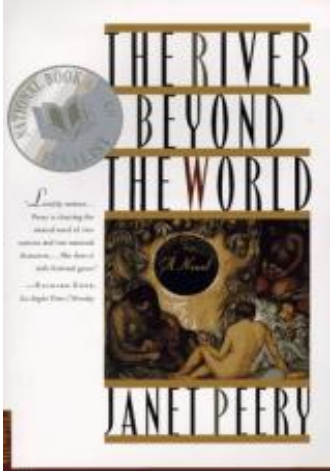
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The River Beyond the World

by Janet Peery



About the Book

Set in the Texas/Mexico border country, a desert made lush through human will, ***The River Beyond the World*** spans nearly half a century in the lives of two very different women and their families.

After leaving her Sierra Madre village, Lusia Cantú finds work in the Texas border town of Rio Paradiso as a housemaid for Eddie Hatch, a woman of strong opinions and a narrow worldview. The two women begin an intimate battle of wills as Eddie asserts her place of privilege while Luisa, subtly but stubbornly, risking the loss of the spiritual power she knew as a girl, tries to assert her own. By turns mystical and mannered, comical and deeply affecting, the story of these to women moves through decades of change, until their complex relationship reaches a painful moment in which each must decide what matters and what can be forgiven.

Discussion Guide

1. The title of the novel, ***The River Beyond the World***, holds many meanings. What do you think Peery had in mind with the phrase, "Beyond the World?" Is it a religious reference to heaven, or does she refer to something much more material?

2. So much of this book concerns entrances and exits, death being balanced by life. What other themes balance each other throughout the story?

3. What advantage, if any, does Luisa gain by being submissive to Eddie throughout their relationship? Is it merely a question of remaining morally superior, of rebelling, or does she gain something more deeply valuable?

4. Besides the Texas/Mexico border, what other lines and boundaries exist in the novel? How do they deepen one's understanding of character?

5. Luisa originally leaves Mexico after being impregnated in a fertility ritual. By remaining in the Hatch household, away from her own culture, does her life grow more or less fertile?

6. The novel is told from three pints of view, Antonia's, Eddie's, and Luisa's. How does this storytelling method enrich the experience of the novel? What do we as readers learn from hearing the differences in these three voices?

7. It could be argued that place acts as a character in this novel. What sort of character would that be -- benevolent, malicious, mercurial, male or female? What other novels can you think of that use place in the same way?

8. What role, if any, does Antonia play in her mother's redemption? Are there any parallels with her own mother's adolescence?

Author Bio

Janet Peery?s books include ALLIGATOR DANCE: Stories, WHAT THE THUNDER SAID: A Novella and Stories, and her first novel THE RIVER BEYOND THE WORLD, which was a finalist for the National Book Award. She has received numerous honors for her fiction including the Rosenthal Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, the Whiting Foundation, the Guggenheim Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Arts, among others. She lives in Cape Charles, Virginia.

Photo Credit: Knox Garvin

Critical Praise

"Lush . . . a beautiful novel, richly evocative of time and place, ambitious in scope, and flawlessly written. "

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