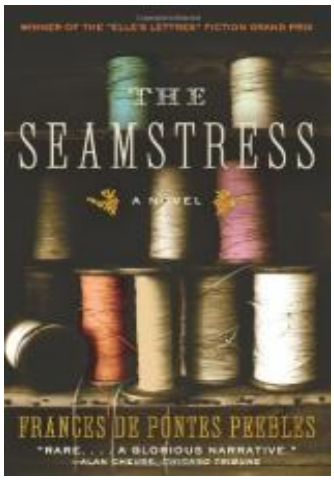
The Seamstress

by Frances de Pontes Peebles



About the Book

As seamstresses, the orphaned sisters Emília and Luzia dos Santos know how to cut, how to mend, and how to conceal. These are useful skills in the backcountry of Brazil, where vigilantes called cangaceiros make the rules. Emília dreams of falling in love and escaping to the city. Luzia also longs to escape their little town, where residents view her deformed arm with suspicion.

But when Luzia is abducted by a group of cangaceiros led by the infamous Hawk, the sisters? quiet lives diverge in ways they never imagined. Emília stumbles into a marriage where her glamorous life is soon overshadowed by heartache and loneliness. Luzia, forced to trek through scrubland and endure a nomadic existence, begins to see the cangaceirosas comrades, not criminals.

Luzia will overcome time and distance to entrust her sister with a great secret --- one Emília vows to keep. And when Luzia?s life is threatened, Emília will risk everything to save her.

Discussion Guide

1. How does their shared childhood as poor, religious, orphaned seamstresses shape Emília and Luzia?s unique perspectives on life?

2. How does access to water define political power in a country like Brazil in the 1920s and 1930s? How did the author?s descriptions of extreme drought affect your appreciation of modern conveniences?

3. How does the Hawk?s treatment of Luzia in the caatinga, or scrub, reveal Antônio?s true nature?

4. What does Emília?s reception into Recife society indicate about the esteem in which the Coelho family is held? To

what extent is her mother-in-law, Dona Dulce Coelho, overly concerned about others? perceptions of Emília?

5. To what extent are secrets responsible for the marriage between Degas and Emília and, much later, for its disintegration?

6. How does Luzia?s behavior in the initial aftermath of Antônio?s death explain her success in becoming the new captain of the cangaceiros? In what other ways does her behavior change once the Hawk is dead?

7. How do Dr. Duarte?s interests in phrenology and politics and his import-export business connect him to the government?s search for the Seamstress and the Hawk?

8. At various points in the novel, how does Dr. Eronildes Epifano represent both salvation and damnation to the cangaceiros? What role does Degas play in alerting Emília to Dr. Eronildes?s duplicity?

9. Given the Seamstress?s attacks on innocent people, to what extent are Emília?s efforts to communicate information to Luzia through newspaper articles and photographs ethically defensible?

10. How does the book?s final image connect with earlier images of bones in **The Seamstress**? Why do you think the author chose to close her book with this image?

Author Bio

Frances de Pontes Peebles is the author of the novel THE SEAMSTRESS, which was translated into nine languages and won the Elle Grand Prix for fiction, the Friends of American Writers Award, and the James Michener-Copernicus Society of America Fellowship. Born in Pernambuco, Brazil, she is a graduate of the Iowa Writers? Workshop.

Critical Praise

"**The Seamstress** is a gripping portrait of the lives of two sisters caught in the political unbalance of a country at a crossroads. Bittersweet, beautifully written, this sweeping saga is as impossible to put down as it is to forget."

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