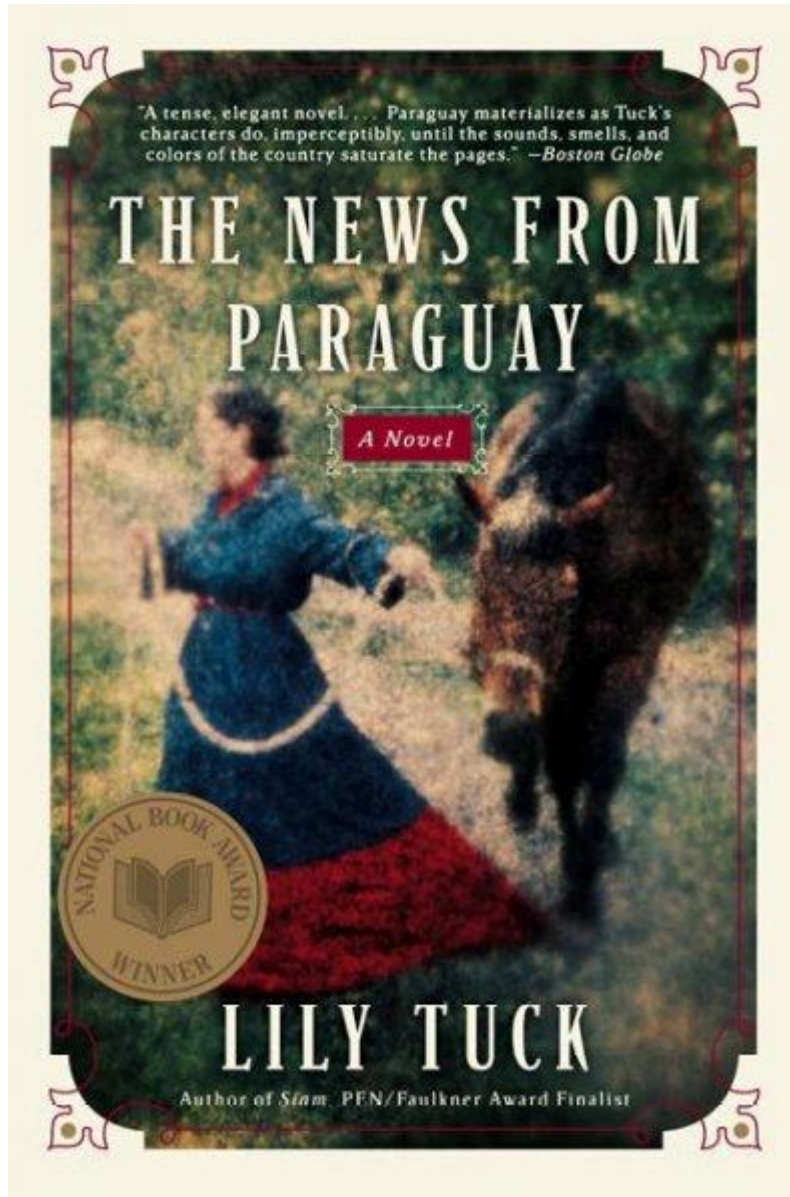


Ann Arbor District Library: Book Club to Go Discussion Guide

<http://www.aadl.org/catalog/record/1308884>

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 a horse 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.

About the Author *Source: NoveList*

Lily Tuck writes frequently about women, like Ella Lynch, who are trying to make lives for themselves in unfamiliar places. Having lived on three continents before her tenth birthday, she remembers in herself a deep self-consciousness about her own status as a foreigner. On her arrival in New York when she was ten, she remembers, "I didn't speak any English . . . and I don't think I opened my mouth for a year, because I didn't want to be the foreigner" (*Publishers Weekly* 23, 7 Jun 2004). She broke her silence, she says, only when she could speak without the accent that would mark her as strange.

Tuck was born in Paris in 1938, where her German parents had moved to escape the Nazis. Mother and daughter spent World War II in Peru and Uruguay while her father served in the French Foreign Legion. The family was reunited briefly in Paris after the war; her parents' divorce brought Tuck to Manhattan as a very quiet, though well-traveled, fourth grader.

Tuck received a bachelor's degree from Radcliffe and, after her first marriage ended in divorce, studied for a Master's degree in American Literature at the Sorbonne. She became a novelist only after a friend introduced her to Gordon Lish, who became her writing teacher and helped her to get her first novel, *Interviewing Matisse*, published in 1991. That was followed by *The Woman Who Walked on Water* (1996) and PEN/Faulkner Award nominee *Siam* (1999). She has also released a collection of short stories, *Limbo, and Other Places I Have Lived* (2001). *The News from Paraguay* won the National Book Award in 2004.

Tuck, whose second husband died in 2003, still lives and writes in Manhattan. She plans to set her next novel in Italy, where she spent childhood summers with her father.

Awards

The News from Paraguay won the 2004 National Book Award (<http://www.nationalbook.org/>).

Reviews

Booklist

The news isn't so good, at least by the end of this saga by the author of the award-winning *Siam* (2000). The focus of her new novel is shared by two

actual nineteenth-century historical figures: Paraguayan Caudillo Francisco Solano Lopez and his Irish-born mistress, Ella Lynch. From the boulevards of Paris, where Ella meets the magnetic but uncouth South American, she follows him to the very provincial Paraguayan capital, Asuncion, and plays Madame de Pompadour to his Louis XV--but her sexy Franco is a small-time dictator trying to make more of his patria than it can support. A catastrophic war with Brazil and Argentina completely flattens the country. Ella ends her days back in Europe, to live on in history as one of those famous paramours of powerful leaders--always good fodder for historical fiction. This novel moves along swiftly but, unfortunately, not very deeply; characterizations seem more image than substance. Still, this is an interesting time and place, so expect requests from historical-novel lovers.

Publishers Weekly

Beautiful Ella Lynch left her native Ireland at 10 and married a French officer at 15; by 19, she is divorced, living with a Russian count and struggling to pay her embittered maid. Thus she's in prime shape to appreciate the quick and ardent attentions of Francisco Solano Lopez, aka Franco, the future dictator of Paraguay, when he spies her on horseback in a Paris park in 1854. Rich, generous and not unhandsome, he makes an appealing lover, and soon Ella is off with him to Paraguay, which he vows to make "a country exactly like France." The story unfolds through Tuck's elegant narration (she flits from one character's point-of-view to another in short segments) and Ella's impassioned diaries. The author's research is impressive (Ella was a real 19th-century courtesan) but never overbearing as she explores the life of a spoiled kept woman in a foreign land, as well as the lives, both high and low, of those around her. Established as Franco's mistress in Asunción, Ella bears Franco many sons, while Franco succeeds his father as ruler and acquires mistress after mistress. Tuck (*Siam; Limbo, and Other Places I Have Lived*) weaves in the stories of Franco's fat, jealous sisters; a disgraced Philadelphia doctor; Ella's wet nurses; and a righteous U.S. minister, among many others, in a richly layered evocation of a complicated world. When Paraguay finds itself at odds with neighboring countries, the novel chronicles the various tragedies and defeats with a cool and unswerving eye. Tuck's novel may not be for the faint of heart, but it is a rich and rewarding read.

Library Journal

In 1854, when a beautiful young divorcee named Ella Lynch catches the eye of dictator-in-training Franco Lopez, she leaves Paris and her live-in

lover to move with him to Paraguay. Intelligent, astoundingly fertile, and an active supporter of Lopez's reign of terror and annihilation of the population (including, eventually, his siblings and mother), Ella thrives in her role as his culture-hungry mistress. Interweaving fictional diary entries and letters with historical fact, Tuck (*Siam; Or, The Woman Who Shot a Man*) tracks dozens of players in an ugly chapter of Paraguayan history from which, it is argued, the country has yet to recover; the shock waves of repugnant cruelty and boorishness ripple from the opening pages clear to the end. A gripping read, this is recommended for readers who have strong stomachs and no need for sympathetic protagonists. --Beth E. Andersen

Kirkus * Starred Review *

The notorious Irish courtesan who also inspired Anne Enright's *The Pleasure of Eliza Lynch* presides regally over Tuck's impressively researched, lushly written latest.

The episodic tale picks up (the historical) "Ella" Lynch's story in 1854 in Paris, where she attracts the attention of Paraguayan prince regent Francisco Solano Lopez ("Franco"), who appropriates the statuesque beauty, and brings her home, to "transform Paraguay into a country exactly like France." Tuck (stories: *Limbo, and the Other Places I Have Lived*, 2002; etc.) skillfully distributes dozens of narrative vignettes among these two impetuously matched lovers, their servants and miscellaneous acquaintances and correspondents, and numerous foreigners ("engineers, architects, physicians, all eager to make their fortunes in this rich new world"). Franco succeeds his tyrannical father Carlos as dictator, and spends his country's resources lavishly, acquiring nearly as many mistresses as possessions, while Ella, continually pregnant, bears him five surviving sons. Tuck contrives numerous episodes that suggest the cruelty and violence underlying this emergent nation's veneer of sophisticated self-indulgence—and particularly Franco's ebullient masculine charm. And when diplomatic relations with neighboring republics are brusquely severed, Paraguay is drawn into a long, enervating war against a Triple Alliance comprising Brazil, Argentina, and "Banda Oriental" (later Uruguay). The story's latter half is a swiftly paced chronicle of military defeats by vastly more numerous opposition forces, starvation, capture, torture, and execution. Prominent among the figures swept up by Franco's self-destructive momentum are his cupiditous and treacherous siblings, an English stonemason hired to build his presidential palace, a scholarly "apothecary general"—and Ella's beloved gray mare Mathilde. It all ends

smashingly, with several views of Ella and her remaining sons, escaped to London and thence Paris, but not from the nightmarish history that has changed them forever.

A splendid realization of its rich subject, and Tuck's best so far.

Literary Criticism

The Mournful Cry of the Urutau: The News from Paraguay, by Lily Tuck

THE NOMINEES FOR the 2004 National Book Award, announced in November of that year, created a small uproar in the hermetic world of book publishing because two established and critically acclaimed writers--Tom Wolfe and Philip Roth--had been passed over in favor of five comparative unknowns. As Caryn James pointed out in the *New York Times*, the five nominees, all women, all living in New York City, also shared "a short story aesthetic . . . built on compressed observations that easily veer into precious writers program language." The judges eventually gave the award to Lily Tuck's *The News from Paraguay*, a novel-in-fragments about the tragic affair between an Irishwoman named Eliza Alicia Lynch and Francisco Solano López, the Paraguayan dictator who led his country through the catastrophic war of 1864-1870, in which some sixty percent of the country's population died.

In Paraguay Tuck's work set off a controversy of a different order. Soon after the award was announced, the Minister of Tourism seized the opportunity to draw international attention to the tiny, landlocked country and invited Tuck for an official visit. When the plan became public, a citizen named Roberto Eaton wrote a series of letters to public officials criticizing the decision to welcome with open arms an author whose writing had insulted the country and its people. Newspapers and talk radio programs quickly picked up on Eaton's description of the novel as "disgusting, absolutely pornographic and a calumny," and others weighed in to criticize its "typical Eurocentric vision" of Latin American history. By the time the author arrived in early February, public hostility had risen to such a degree that she received threatening phone calls at her hotel and had to be escorted by armed bodyguards.

As Tuck found out, most Paraguayans do not consider Francisco Solano López the sex-crazed barbarian who appears in her book, but rather a

national hero whose courage and personal sacrifice saved the country from being partitioned between Argentina and Brazil. That positive image of Solano López is, in point of fact, exaggerated: it was part of the nationalist mythology initiated in the 1920s at a time of friction with neighboring Bolivia and then later maintained by the authoritarian regime of General Alfredo Stroessner (1954-1989), which notoriously manipulated the country's tragic history for ideological purposes. In what follows, we do not intend to defend Francisco Solano López, but rather to clear up the distorted history that appears in *The News from Paraguay* and to draw out the racist and colonialist mythology that orients Tuck's novel. It may seem petty or misguided to criticize a work of fiction for failing to conform to historical fact, when many a consecrated masterpiece subtly alters known events so as to better convey an author's interpretation. Tuck's novel presents a somewhat different situation, however, because part of the appeal of this book what sets it apart from the other award nominees, for example--is its ability to inform readers about the little-known history of the developing world. Its unsparingly grim subject matter gives *The News from Paraguay* a kind of moral authority, particularly when the narrative implicitly criticizes European characters who cannot remember which South American country has just been destroyed, or who fail to treat a child dying of malaria because they do not understand his language. But this is not *Hotel Rwanda* or even *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. *The News from Paraguay* may appeal to the better instincts of its North American readers, but as we will show, the novel fails to provide a compassionate or even objective representation of Paraguayan history and in the end offers only a set of facile and uninformed stereotypes.

Tuck's novel, it is clear, actually tries to be fair to its principal character, the beautiful and accomplished Lynch, known as "Ella" in the novel. Given her glamour, her unconventional relationship to López, and the enormity of the catastrophe she witnessed, "Madame" Lynch has over the years inspired an immense amount of admiration, opprobrium, and curiosity among Paraguayans and foreigners alike. This is not the first novelized treatment of her life but it is one of the most personal. The structure, a series of short, imagistic vignettes interspersed with passages from Ella's fictional diary, enable Tuck to offer suggestive glimpses into the intimate life of Lynch and the López family and to register both the psychological development of her characters and the gradual destruction of the world around them. Tuck's depiction rises above the standard portrayal of Lynch as a gold-digging harlot who encouraged her foolish paramour to launch a war against

Paraguay's neighbors so as to emerge as Emperor and Empress of a powerful South American state. Tuck sketches in Lynch's nostalgia for Ireland, which she left as a teenager during the worst years of the potato famine, and balances her self-centered and frivolous nature with what emerges as a real devotion to her seven children and their father. Tuck judiciously trims the gossip surrounding Lynch's years in the sophisticated demi-monde of Second Empire Paris to include her brief (but never legally terminated) marriage to a French military pharmacist and an (alleged) affair with a Russian aristocrat. What is more, Tuck does credit to Lynch's intelligence and linguistic abilities (she spoke English, French, and Spanish fluently, and picked up a smattering of Guaran, the Paraguayan national language). Tuck ultimately sides with Lynch in the series of lawsuits she undertook in the last years of her life in a fruitless attempt to reclaim properties lost during the war.

While vindicating Lynch, the novel's depiction of Paraguay and its inhabitants trades in the same exoticizing discourse it criticizes in a few of its European characters. Though by now we are all resigned to accepting the publishers' mantra that sex sells books, the rampant, slightly aberrant couplings displayed in *The News from Paraguay* actively feed some cherished misconceptions about life and love in the tropics. Through such minor figures as the English stonemason Alonzo Taylor and the Hungarian mercenary Count von Wisner, Paraguay comes across as a brothel where Europeans can indulge in behavior their home society would condemn as scandalous. When writers like Somerset Maugham, Graham Greene, and Joseph Conrad show us similar images, it is generally to criticize the decadence of the European characters and their parasitic relationship to the native communities of the tropics. That is hardly the case in *The News from Paraguay*, since the glimpses Tuck offers us into native society only serve to repeat voyeuristically the thrill-seeking of Taylor and von Wisner, offering readers a peek at the wild and slightly dangerous sexual practices of the Paraguayans. The relationship between Commandant José de Carmen García and María Oliva--"a large-assed girl from the village"--conjoins the contemporary image of hypersexualized Latinas with Victorian obsessions about health and hygiene. We first encounter them, inflagrante, on the floor of the Commandant's house; when he finds his penis covered with syphilitic chancres a few pages later, a wave of sex tourism to Paraguay is presumably staved off by the understated warning: "Infection spread[s] more quickly in a hot, humid climate." (Given the novel's rapid

descent from syphilis into war, torture, and starvation, it is hard to imagine what the *Vogue* reviewer who described it as "charming" had in mind.)

To set the record straight, the historical Paraguay was influenced by a custom of informal concubinage that developed, in part, out of a Guaraní Indian heritage favoring polygamy. In addition, when the first post-independence government tried to break the power of the old Spanish-born elite in the 1820s and 30s, it prohibited marriage between the Spaniards and local Paraguayan women but did not forbid other kinds of cohabitation. The result, which aroused more outside comment than it probably merited, was a society typified by more open associations than those usually found in rural South America. In spite of what the novel seems to be saying, however, the culture that developed in Paraguay was neither sexually promiscuous, nor even especially liberal on such matters. As in many frontier communities in the United States, Australia, and Canada at the time, couples formed relations as they had to and formalized them when they could.

As far as the López family is concerned, Tuck is somewhat less decisive, since she has staked the success of her novel on her ability to persuade the reader that Lynch's regard for the Marshal President and his country was genuine. That may be why López, improbably styled "Franco" in the novel, comes off as well as he does--considerably better than in John Gimlette's *At the Tomb of the Inflatable Pig*, a nonfiction travelogue whose vision of Paraguay is even less justified than Tuck's. Although López leaves Ella's bed so full of dark hair that her maid believed "a dog or an animal with fur" had slept there, he still impresses the Parisians with his knowledge of Rousseau and photography, and his mastery of fashionable dancing. He is the classic colonialist stereotype of a savage who has acquired a "veneer" of sophistication, a gourmand who introduces European wine and sauce béarnaise into his long-isolated country, but still chomps loudly on bird beaks, "licking his fingers when he was finished and washing the meal down with brandy" (171). Women for López are likewise "a physical need, like eating or drinking or going to the toilet."

When Tuck compares Franco to other South Americans, the President's brutishness seems suspiciously endemic. His sisters Rafaela and Inocencia are caricatures of gluttony, stuffing their mouths full of food and wearing dresses fashioned from curtains looted out of a Brazilian mansion. The venality that links the whole family is not limited to them only. Indeed,

Franco's adversaries are just as bad, as we see in the example of the champagne-guzzling Captain d'Eseragnolle Taunay, a Brazilian army officer who wipes his bottom with pages torn from *Don Quijote* while his soldiers rape and murder Paraguayan women. The historical Taunay was a courageous and extravagantly cultured man who authored one of nineteenth-century Brazil's most popular novels. The Latin American elites, in Tuck's rendition, are invariably driven wild by power, money, and desire for the fine things they can purchase or steal, but never fully appreciate. Lynch's eldest son, who followed his father into battle at age ten, is the epitome of this unrefined, unexamined lust when he imagines himself trading his necklace of enemy ears for a young woman's sexual favors. Historically, the stories featuring the taking of human ears can be traced to a single incident in Mato Grosso, Brazil, in early 1865 when Paraguayan troops were said to have made a shroud of enemy ears for display in Asunción. British and North American eyewitnesses, who had no reason to downplay Paraguayan brutality, claimed the atrocity never took place (Whigham, 254-55, n. 29).

Tuck's fetishization of Paraguayan sexuality may seem trivial in comparison with her work's many historical lapses, but the two are not unrelated. *The News from Paraguay* chooses to privilege the physical appetites of Francisco Solano López and his people rather than the political causes of the war that enveloped them. The novel discusses the politics of the war in two brief scenes. In the first, Franco tells a Paraguayan subject that Argentina and Brazil "were plotting to take over all of the Rio de la Plata, and [that] it was Paraguay's duty to stop them" (98). The line is accurate enough, in that the historical López understood that certain members of Argentina's political elite, who had only recently managed to end decades of civil war in their own country, dreamed of extending their sovereignty over Paraguay and reuniting the provinces that for three centuries had formed a single Spanish colony. He also realized Brazil was not acting altruistically when, in August, 1864, it ignored Paraguay's wishes and intervened in Uruguay on behalf of a useful chieftain, the Colorado leader Venancio Flores. In a country whose historical identity was founded on its independence from both Spain and Argentina, this invasion of a neighboring state seemed a direct threat. López, acting to protect the balance of power in the region, ordered the seizure of a Brazilian steamer, the *Marqués de Olinda*, and soon afterwards sought permission to transport his troops across Argentine territory to attack the Brazilians and Colorados at Montevideo. Argentina's president, Bartolomé Mitre, denied

López authorization to transit the province of Corrientes, and was ostensibly shocked when the Paraguayan army occupied the area anyway. Shortly thereafter, López's Uruguayan allies surrendered and the Marshal found himself fighting a terrible war of attrition against the "Triple Alliance" of Brazil, Argentina, and Uruguay.

On May 1, 1865, Mitre and Flores met with Brazilian representatives in Buenos Aires to negotiate the treaty of triple alliance. The terms of the treaty were considered so potentially incendiary that the three signatories agreed not to reveal certain clauses of its text until after the war ended. Even so, it was widely speculated that Brazil and Argentina intended to resolve long-standing border disputes at the expense of Paraguay. According to historian Charles Kolinski, one Argentine newspaper wrote, "The treaty is secret, the meeting is secret, only the shame is public" (99). When the terms of the treaty were leaked by a Uruguayan diplomat in early 1866, it was immediately clear why Mitre, Flores, and Brazil's Emperor Dom Pedro had preferred to keep it quiet. The treaty outlined four major conditions:

- 1) The war would continue until López was killed or forced to abandon Paraguay;
- 2) None of the Allies would seek a separate peace with his government;
- 3) Paraguay would be forced to pay the entire cost of the war, and forbidden to re-arm within a generation; and
- 4) Argentina and Brazil would realize their maximum territorial claims relative to Paraguay.

The publication of the treaty in a Parliamentary Blue Book sparked off vehement protest in Europe and throughout the Americas, and considerably enhanced the hitherto negligible British public support for "the gallant little country." Peru's government issued a protest on behalf of the other Andean countries in which it compared the Allies' actions to France's invasion of Mexico in 1861 and Spain's attempt to recolonize Santo Domingo and the Pacific guano islands during the same period (Kolinski, 93-94).

In Paraguay the publication of the treaty galvanized support for continued resistance. Beyond the absolute certainty of regime change, there were

some 150,000 square kilometers of national territory at stake. On this basis, Paraguayans rallied around López as the symbol and guarantor of the country's sovereignty. When the text of the treaty appeared in the state gazette in September 1866, López's legitimacy as popular leader grew exponentially, as did popular determination and willingness to sacrifice life, labor, and property to the national cause. Even as the Allied leadership continued to cast their campaign as a struggle to "liberate" the Paraguayan people from a tyrannical dictator, those same people stepped forward to offer their lives and property to the Marshal.

This does not mean, of course, that the Allies' charges against López were without foundation: the accusations summarized in an anonymous 1870 pamphlet entitled *Los papeles del tirano* were substantiated by other, less biased sources, including George Frederick Masterman's *Seven Eventful Years in Paraguay*, from which Tuck draws extensively in depicting the torture and executions López inflicted on large numbers of his compatriots during the final months of the war. What it does explain, on the other hand, is the fervor and desperation of the Paraguayan defense, not only López's obstinacy and his final, mad frenzy, but the sentiment that moved ordinary Paraguayans to continue fighting long after the adult male population had been virtually annihilated.

Curiously, the novel introduces the historical fact of the Triple Alliance Treaty in a brief scene involving Bartolomé Mitre, Venancio Flores, Dom Pedro, and the Duke of Caxias, who, historically, would eventually replace Mitre as commander in chief of the allied armies. In the novel, each of the conditions that were originally judged suitable for public consumption--the plan to depose López, the insistence on reparations, and the prohibition against a separate peace--is voiced by one of the three heads of state, and the meeting ends with Caxias's pronouncement that the war "would not last long" (121). (In fact it was Mitre who infamously declared that the five-and-a-half-year war would be over in six months.) It is hard to imagine why Tuck would choose to conceal the last, decisive condition of the treaty, thus keeping a secret that Parliament saw fit to expose some 130 years earlier. It may be that the downward spiral of the novel's plot did not lend itself to fine political digressions once the action had shifted to scenes of torture, disease, and desolation. Or perhaps its fragmented, imagistic structure simply failed to accommodate the intricate web of historical forces and actors that the historical reality required: after all, a "short story aesthetic" is hardly conducive to conveying the many-sided relation of López and

Madame Lynch, much less the historical complexities of a six-year war. Joseph Conrad created his "broadest canvas," *Nostramo*, from roughly the same set of documentary sources a century earlier.

Back in the 1880s, the Argentine poet Carlos Guido y Spano summed up his country's feeling of collective guilt for the destruction of Paraguay when he portrayed the call of a reclusive forest bird as a funeral dirge:

Weep, weep *urutaú*, in the branches of the yatay tree,
There is no more Paraguay, where I was born like you.
Weep, weep, *urutaú*.

Conrad and Guido y Spano were each trying to grasp the essential significance of a monumental tragedy and to convey to readers how and why a people could offer a sacrifice on such a colossal scale. But these are different days, and our contemporary literary forms--at least according to the National Book Award--tend more toward fractured instances of self-revelation than to understanding politics, society, and culture in any integrated way.

What is ultimately most disturbing about *The News from Paraguay* is not the Eurocentric biases of the novel or even its historical inaccuracies, but the simple fact that its selection for one of this country's highest prizes for literary fiction provoked so little comment--in English, at least--about its grossly stereotypical vision of Paraguay's history and people. The promise of multicultural insights the novel offers is so appealing that many readers have failed to notice that the promise is largely unfulfilled: rather than taking on the real challenges of Paraguayan history--the complex interaction of internal and external factors, of politics, economics and culture--the novel falls back on willfully-ignorant clichés. In this regard, *The News from Paraguay* is hardly anomalous: despite the popularity of exotic settings like Congo, Iran, and Japan, we are today fed a steady diet of fictions whose sense of solidarity with the people living in those regions is only partial at best, and that ultimately reinforce antiquated notions of Western superiority. If the ongoing boom in World Literature is to do more than merely titillate North Americans with lurid tales of "Third World" barbarism, its offering will have to be examined more critically than *The News from Paraguay* has been up till now.

Source: French, Jennifer L., and Thomas Wigham. "The Mournful Cry of the Urutau: The News from Paraguay, by Lily Tuck." *The Midwest Quarterly* 50.1 (2008): 32+. Literature Resource Center.

<http://www.aadl.org/research/browse/books>

Discussion Questions Source:

<http://www.harpercollins.com/author/authorExtra.aspx?authorID=20714&isbn13=9780060934866&displayType=readingGuide>

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?

Multimedia

'News From Paraguay' Wins National Book Award (Radio Broadcast)

<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=4176111>

A discussion of the novel on NPR.

Further Reading

The Pleasure of Eliza Lynch by Anne Enright

<http://www.aadl.org/catalog/record/1200864>

(Call number: Fiction Enright)

Anne Enright's version of Eliza Lynch's life is both darker and more sumptuous than Lily Tuck's, at least in part because it includes her previous lives as a poor child in Ireland and as an expensive prostitute in Paris.

Siam: Or the Woman Who Shot a Man by Lily Tuck

<http://www.aadl.org/catalog/record/1163480>

(Call number: Fiction Tuck)

Claire, the young bride of a government contractor, arrives in Bangkok with her husband on March 9, 1967, the day U.S. planes begin bombing runs on North Vietnam. At a dinner party, she meets and befriends Jim Thompson, the real-life American entrepreneur and founder of the Thai Silk Company. Weeks later, on Easter Sunday, Thompson vanishes without a trace in the Thai highlands. As the political implications of Thompson's disappearance

surface, Claire becomes increasingly obsessed with his fate. Her quest into what happened, fueled by the longing and loneliness she feels in an exotic land marked by growing unrest, leads to a tragic truth that becomes a metaphor for two cultures in collision. Written in powerful, arresting prose, this taut suspense novel further establishes Lily Tuck as a major voice in literary fiction.

Limbo and Other Places I Have Lived: Stories by Lily Tuck

<http://www.aadl.org/catalog/record/1187281>

(Call number: Fiction Tuck)

Lily Tuck understands that emotional transformations cannot-and should not -- be easily explained. In her elegant and penetrating first collection, *Limbo, and Other Places I Have Lived*, Tuck offers a portrait of the subtle shifts that can render the accommodations we make to our lives or to our partners suddenly impossible. Tuck's characters are in the midst of a composed yet profound rebellion, the basis of which is a growing estrangement from the self, a need to return to some fundamental truth whose discovery, as often as not, will force significant change. These characters travel to unknown, exotic places, and, while there, find themselves deeply immersed in observation-of the natives of the locality, of the local customs, of the foreign landscape -- in an effort to discern some elemental truth about who they themselves are. Yet rather than see the self reflected back clear as rainwater, these women meet instead with disorientation, confusion; they are disappointed by the people closest to them -- lovers, husbands, members of their families. Tuck is a writer of such grace and understatement that one does not immediately recognize the piercing psychological acuity and deftness of her observations. Her characters are full of poignant yearning and guarded optimism, of unwavering honesty, even in the face of painful disappointment or physical chaos.

Author's official website

http://www.harpercollins.com/authors/20714/Lily_Tuck/index.aspx

Information and resources from the author's publisher.

Summaries from AADL.org Catalog

Read-Alikes *Source: Novelist*

Madame Bovary by Gustave Flaubert

<http://www.aadl.org/catalog/record/1024810>

(Call number: Fiction Flaubert)

Flaubert wrote *Madame Bovary* as an exercise in writerly discipline; the result is a tour de force exploration of the deadly banality of provincial life. Like Ella Lynch, Emma Bovary imagines herself more than she is, although Emma's imagination is confined by the conventions of the romance novels that have framed her view of life. Her efforts first to make her husband into a romantic hero and then to find that hero in an illicit lover result in disaster for herself and for others.

Vanity Fair by William Thackeray

<http://www.aadl.org/catalog/record/1066131>

(Call number: Fiction Thackeray)

Ella Lynch's career was well underway when Thackeray's masterpiece was published, but its heroine, Becky Thatcher, could have been her model. Becky is a poor girl from a poor family who exploits every opportunity, as well as her considerable intelligence and keen understanding of the darker sides of human nature, to raise herself into the upper classes of British society.

Extra!

As Ella adored her horse Mathilde, have any members of the group ever shared a close bond to an animal? Have fun and discuss!

