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The News from Paraguay
ISBN13: 9780060934866

Acceptance Speech for the National Book Award

Thank you to the National Book Foundation committee, the National Book Award judges, my publisher, HarperCollins, my wonderful editor, Terry Karten and my agent, Georges Borchardt.

Also I want to acknowledge my fellow "unknown" finalists. During the past few weeks we have spoken and met several times and I think we all agree about how allied we are and how very supportive we feel toward each other for which I very grateful. And I want to say how much I admire their work.

Everyone always asks me why Paraguay? I don't have an answer. As a fiction writer, one would think that I would have been able to make something up by now like: my first boyfriend came from Asunción, I found a cache of letters in my grandmother's attic in Lima—no. In real life I am a fairly truthful person. It is true however that I did live in South America as a child, although never in Paraguay. Actually I have never been to Paraguay nor do I intend to go. I think the honest or most likely answer to why

Paraguay? is that I like to write about "stuff" — excuse the word — that most people don't know very much about. I think, as a writer, it gives me an edge. Also, since I come from German stock, it satisfies my need to teach or instruct. But mainly, I think, the story of Francisco Solano Lopez and his overriding blind ambition that resulted in the war of the Triple Alliance and the ruin of a once prosperous and peaceful country is a cautionary tale.

Thank you!