

MATA DOCE



Author: Luciany Aparecida
Publisher: Alfaguara
Year of Publication: 2023
Pages: 296
Format: 15x23,4 cm

A lyrical, impactful portrait of a majority-Black community led by brave women in the fictional village of Mata Doce, this novel tells the story of Maria Teresa, who, after suffering a big loss, starts working in cattle killing, a job traditionally done by men...

Mata Doce is a place where many things have happened. It all began with two women – strong and respected in their small village in rural Bahia – who adopted a little girl named Maria Teresa. Maria Teresa will live many lives, all of them in the same village, a place filled with magic, roses and pain. After being adopted, she has the chance to study, learn how to read and write, find a job and even a good boy to marry, Zezito... But on the day before the wedding, Zezito is murdered with a shot to the back. The murderer, Colonel Gerônimo Amâncio, killed him due to old rivalries with Zezito's family.

After this terrible event, Maria Teresa will find the strength to move on. She will change her name and her life, and will start working for the very same man who murdered her husband, killing oxen at his livestock fazenda. While becoming more and more an important figure in the slaughterhouse and in the Colonel's farm, she will turn her back to the past, and will become known with the moniker of Filinha Mata-Boi, The Ox-Killing Girl.

Around her, a whole world of people, connections and violence has grown, and she tells us all about it at the age of 92. Now, alone in her house, she finally has a clear view on everything that has happened, and through her eyes we can see a sample of human life at its best and worst.

Memory and present come together in this story of loss and hope, where we meet various important figures of Mata Doce, and their destinies amidst unrestrained violence. Aparecida's writing, jumping from first to third person and from past to present, is a powerful means for the reader to find themselves immersed in this reality, which is as strongly connected to daily life as it is to prophecies and magic, with the chants and the hand of the Orishas always present and felt.

The author

Luciany Aparecida, from Vale do Rio Jiquiriçá, in Bahia, is the author of *Macala* (2022, Luna Parque/Fósforo) and *Joanna Mina* (2022, paralelo13S). Under the name Ruth Ducaso, she has published *Florim* (2020) and *Contos ordinários de melancolia* (2017), both with the imprint paralelo13S. This is Aparecida's first novel under her own name.



From the book

«Maria Teresa stood before the live bull and tore off his blinders. Though the animal lost his controlled sense of direction, he had no hope of escaping. The woman believed it was only right for death to be met head-on. As she faced the bull, his lifeblood still ran hot beneath his hide.

Both knew the time had come. The woman wished to unburden her grief. The animal, now trapped for slaughter, had once wished to escape. But the leather blinders, which they had strapped so they could drive him obediently to the slaughterhouse, threw off his animal instincts. Right then, woman and bull each had their own desires and glanced at one another. But she, the dominant one, took control and swung down the butt of her axe, landing the first blow on the back of his head, the exact place to strike him down in pain. The bull shuddered. Another swing and the unmistakable end. He fell on a bed of green banana leaves that had been laid out for the ritual.

In *Mata Doce*, bull slaughtering was a male tradition. But that early dawn, Maria Teresa ushered in a new one.

“The girl’s here.”

“Maria Teresa?”

“Yes, the daughter of the women of the lajedo.”

“Let her in.”

“Let her in?”

“Yes, let her in.”

The morning dew dampened the green bed that held the bull’s weight and smoothed the air that lay over that death in rolling curves. Maria Teresa took a deep breath. For the first time since the incident, she could exhale without being suffocated by the twinge of memory. The bull was on the ground. Toni de Maximiliana dos Santos, the official cattleman of that bullpen, said:

“Now we bleed him.”

Maria Teresa plunged in her blade and sliced the bull from throat to dewlap. The blood flowed its course. The fresh, moistened banana leaves were a welcome garden for the vanishing of that eternity.»

Praises

«*Mata Doce* is a ghost story—or, better yet, the story of what and who lives within us. Or it’s the opposite: a story about life in all its brutal workings. *Mata Doce* is also the home of brave, obstinate woman, able to write their own story despite the old power holders. With magnetic prose, Luciany Aparecida gives life to great characters, such as Filinha Mata-Boi, her mothers Tuninha and Mariinha, and Mané da Gaita, writing a novel about a simultaneously loving and violent Brazil, a Brazil going from Maria Firmina dos Reis’s Úrsula to typewritten letters to recipients who will never get them. *Mata Doce* is a novel, but it’s also a happening.»

Michely Verunsch, winner of Jabuti Prize 2022

«Between brutality and finesse, Luciany Aparecida builds a world on loss, grief, and affection. Through a haunting narrative, featuring solid, deep characters, *Mata Doce* offers us the best there is in contemporary Brazilian literature.»

Jeferson Tenório, award-winning author and activist