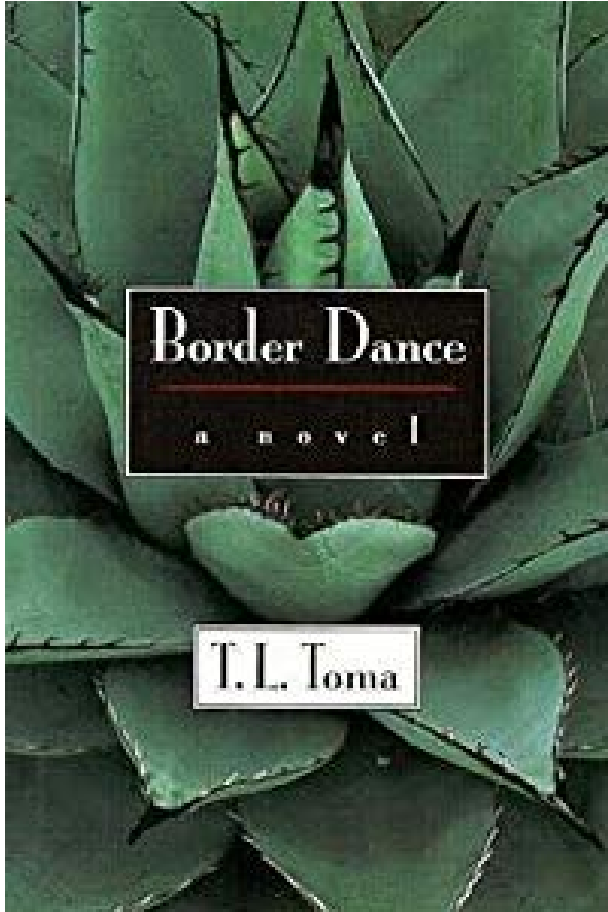


Border Dance: A Novel



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Frank Reed is a contemporary Prufrock, a man who has lost his moral and emotional centers under the weight of the social and moral disintegration pervasive in society. Dispatched from his Boston-based company to the Mexican border with orders to negotiate a deal that would put profits in American pockets, Reed finds himself on a personal odyssey deep into the Mexican interior. Toma's characters "both major and minor" are complex, ambiguous, and multifaceted. Frank's despair and moral confusion, his tendency to sentimentality, and his ethical imprecision are convincingly etched. Toma's portraits of the Mexican functionary, Garcia, and his family are masterfully nuanced though drawn in broad strokes. As the focus shifts from Boston to Mexico and back, the narrative is propelled by parallel involvements of the major characters: Frank's rediscovery of passion with the young Mexican woman, Socorro, is balanced at home by his wife's attraction to a neighborhood butcher and by their daughter's growing interest in a brilliant but alienated young emigre student. As Frank struggles to reinvent the man he has become, he becomes swept up in the plans of the young Mexican woman, who is desperate to cross the border into what she perceives as a land of wealth and opportunity. The extent of his middle-aged angst is matched by the reach of her hope. In this biting, though often humorous, first novel, the American dream turns harsh.