Today Is Wednesday
Author:
Patricio Nouveau

READER'S NAME: Kenneth Barger

Gilmar is an eleven-year-old boy. He lives in a mining community in Bolivia. Together with his little sister Mariela and his dog Quyitu, he is on a quest to find out why the pictures of cities in his schoolbook have disappeared.

Lãnh is an eleven-year-old girl. She lives in an orphanage in Vietnam ever since her parents perished in flooding on the Perfume River. The pictures in her schoolbook, too, have disappeared.

Sas is an eleven-year-old boy. He lives in Sierra Leone. On a Wednesday, rebel soldiers stormed his school and took him and his schoolmates away to be child soldiers. He pores over the pictures that still remain in his schoolbook.

Hoy es miércoles, by Patricio Nouveau, is an adventure novel in the magical realism literary tradition. It is divided into three books: The Book of Gilmar, The Book of Lãnh, The Book of Sas. Each child narrates his or her own book.

The story unfolds in what seems like a dream state. Gilmar knows he must find his way to the next lighthouse, but he does not know why. Lãnh rides a water buffalo and comes to a halt at a bridge because she knows what she seeks is on the other side, but she does not know what it is. They are aided in their quests by a grumpy teenager who makes kites, a blind old man who paints wooden fish, and a train conductor clad in a mining helmet. The reader accompanies them as they inexorably make their way toward something.

Each child has a distinct voice with different syntax and lexicon. The Book of Gilmar is narrated in Bolivian Spanish peppered with words in phrases in Quechua; The Book of Lãnh has many Vietnamese expressions and a smattering of French; and The Book of Sas includes dialogue in Greenlandic and Mende. Though the context always makes the dialogue clear enough, there is also a glossary at the end of the book.

This is an adventure, but it is much more than that. It is an examination of mental processes such as idea, imagination, learning, thought, dream. It is a coming-of-age story and a tale of redemption. It is a book about child soldiers, a topic that merits much more attention than it receives. And it is an utterly unique approach to this topic.

The physical book itself, too, is unique. Childish drawings of fish are hand-colored by developmentally disabled persons working in a Spanish workshop. Each copy is signed by the colorer. More elaborate, handmade editions are available.

The author writes of places he knew in life. As an aid worker, he witnessed conflict and hardship in

many places, including the countries of the children of this book. In 1998, when he was working for peace in Angola during a conflict involving thousands of child soldiers, he disappeared.

The cover of *Hoy es miércoles* reads, “Children whose future has been stolen have only their imagination.” The author, too, was robbed of his future, but his imagination lives on in this masterful, baffling, joyful, heartbreaking work. This is an important book.