

Blood Lake

Review

Peter Werbe

2019

a review of

Blood Lake: A Filomena Buscarsela Mystery by Kenneth Wishnia. PM Press edition 2014; Spanish translation 2018. Originally published HB 2002

Anarchist fans of detective novels and murder mysteries who don't like cops have to suspend a little of their social critique since it is the police, ex-cops, and private eyes who are solving the crimes. Anarchists as a rule don't do much sleuthing.

However, the best of modern crime fiction isn't simple escapist whodunits, but is often filled with social commentary and indictments of the current political and economic structure. Do their authors share much with an anarchist world view? Maybe not directly, but their central characters usually display an almost obsessive insistence on repairing the social damage caused by a violent act. Certainly, some are the model of repressive police power such as Mickey Spillane's Mike Hammer. Most, however, are more like Tony Hillerman's Joe Leaphorn and Jim Chee of the Navajo Tribal Police who desire to bring the world back into harmony by solving disruptive crimes.

Kenneth Wishnia's fifth and final novel in his Filomena Buscarsela series fits the latter definition well. He takes his heroine from her native Ecuador where she was a youthful revolutionary guerrilla to New York City as an NYPD cop, and finally as a private investigator. The labyrinthine plot follows a path of slash, batter, and splatter strewn with the dead—priests who signed a human rights statement, a reporter hot on the trail of those behind the engineered chaos of an approaching presidential election, and a candidate running for the office.

Filomena expected none of this having brought her teen-age daughter to Ecuador to introduce the young woman to her extended family and the culture she was forced to leave 20 years earlier. Suddenly, she is thrust into searching for the murderer of a priest who protected her during her guerrilla days. As the bodies pile up, Filomena becomes a fugitive from the law, trekking across mountains, dodging phantom left wing guerrillas and right wing death squads. All this as the economy is in free fall, protests are attacked by the army, while floods and landslides add to the sense of impending disaster.

Filomena says, "There is a pattern. So far mayhem has followed me everywhere I go." And, so it breathlessly does.

However, there is more to the book than simply its action-filled plot. Wishnia's years spent in Ecuador provide a tour of the country as Filomena climbs into the sierra highlands on the lam or does simple familial chores with her relatives. His eye for the region's culture and customs are woven into the story, so much so that the book contains a glossary so we'll know what *aguardiente* is that people are drinking or what a *pollera* is that mountain Indian women are wearing.

The 2002 hardback edition of *Blood Lake* was originally published in English when Ecuador was in the midst of endless crises. The story has enough room for left/liberal critiques which note the obvious wealth of the ruling class amidst massive poverty, endemic violence, official corruption, the murderous nature of the police and army,

death squad training at the U.S. School of the Americas, and even a swipe at “civilization” itself, complete with scare quotes.

One doesn't expect an anarchist perspective in a book of this nature that goes beyond a leftist critique of the abominable brutal client state/U.S. imperial domination of the region, but one immediately thinks of those anarchists who are currently offering more thoroughgoing critiques and resistance in those countries. But that's for another book.

Ecuador's situation then mirrors that faced today by the people of Central America who flee a thousand miles on foot to the southern border of the U.S. to escape similar situations. None of this is simply the bad luck of geography, either then or now, but rather the result of a cruel exploitation emanating from El Coloso del Norte.

The end of *Blood Lake* isn't the usual simple one where the murderer is frog-marched off in handcuffs. Some justice is exacted, but the greater crimes continue. Just like real life.

PM has just published *Blood Lake* in Spanish, hence the translation into that language accompanying this review.

Peter Werbe is a member of the *Fifth Estate* editorial collective.

Spanish translation of this review by Luigi Celentano, a translator, writer, and editor based in Buenos Aires. undergroundletters.com.

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Fifth Estate #403, Spring 2019

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