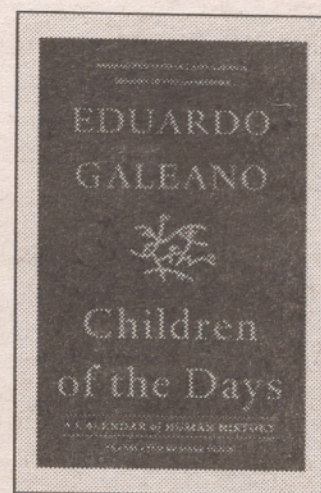


Revisiting history, one day at a time

Uruguayan writer Eduardo Galeano transforms history into a calendar and sets the past on its head

BY MIKE WOLD
CONTRIBUTING WRITER



Children of the Days: A Calendar of Human History
By Eduardo Galeano, Nation Books

"It happened in Africa, in Ife, the sacred city of the Yoruba kingdom, maybe on a day like today..."

So begins the entry for April 5 in Eduardo Galeano's "Children of the Days." Though it's billed as one of those books that tells you something that happened in history on each particular day of the year, it's much more and something different than that.

Galeano, a Uruguayan poet, historian and master of the short anecdote, isn't about to let himself be constrained by the vagaries or indefiniteness of when or if something actually happened or by the issue of whether a story is history or myth. Instead, he sets out to open windows — one each day — as a way of seeing and using history and myth to understand the world we live in.

Books of days originated in religious practice as a way of lifting a believer out of ordinary time into an experience of the sacred. Historical books of days have a somewhat different purpose, generally to commemorate important events and people. This book, though, falls somewhere in between. Galeano has something subversive in mind: to lift us out of our ordinary understanding of history as a series of important events and people to the recognition that history happens in every moment, is carried forward by every person and is found as much in the stories we tell as in the real event.

For Galeano, history circles around again and again, not so much as a cycle that repeats, but as an opportunity for a second chance. He notes that in the Quechua language the word ñaupá means "was" and

also means "will be." On another date, he compares the assassinations of Che Guevara, Emiliano Zapata and Augusto Sandino without mentioning that these did not actually occur on the same day of the year. His point is a different one: "These three were punished for trying to make history instead of repeating it."

Galeano chooses exemplary figures like Che, but just as often he chooses ordinary people, villains, con men, gods, myths or animals: "Some people maintain the Wright brothers invented the airplane around this time in 1903. ... The only thing absolutely certain is that three hundred and fifty million years earlier, a pair of tiny flaps sprouted from the body of a dragonfly's ancestor." He adds, "Dragonflies were the first to travel by air."

He is also interested in pointing out the hypocrisy and syncretism of the Catholic Church, with 10 different entries involving Jesus Christ. In the entry for December 12, he notes the arrival of the Virgin of Guadalupe on that date, as the reincarnation of Aztec mother god Tonantzin so that "Mexico and Jesus share the same mother." "Tezcatlipoca, Jesus on the cross, points in the four directions from which the winds of the indigenous universe flow."

For April 21, he tells of an Easter procession in Spain. "Jesus Christ, being whipped by Roman soldiers, passed by. A voice broke the silence. Seated on his father's shoulders, Marcos Rabasco shouted at the man being whipped: 'Fight back! Fight back!' Marcos was two years, four months and twenty-one days old." Another entry records how God was tried and sentenced to death during the Russian Revolution for "crimes against humanity."

Galeano's humor can be pointed and sometimes ribald. I'll leave it to the reader to discover the punch line for "World Science Day," which reports that "the world invests five times as much in male sex stimulants and female silicone implants as in finding a cure for Alzheimer's." In another joke, reported from the Dominican Republic, he lampoons the cult of the "international expert" with his electronic equipment and his assumption that he can arrive without being asked, give advice that is unwanted and get paid for it. One ironic entry reports that after years of claiming that poverty was declining worldwide, experts found a flaw in their model and realized there were half a billion more poor people than they had thought. "The poor," Galeano writes, "already knew."

One criticism of the book is that it is sorely lacking in footnotes or a bibliography that could guide the reader in exploring the background of the anecdotes, though it's clear that Galeano intends this as a literary and not a scholarly work.

It's also hard to imagine using this book as it's intended. The stories are too compelling. Reading only one a day would be a spiritual discipline in itself.

As for what happened in Ife on a day much like today, a dying man told his three sons that his cherished possessions would belong to the one who could fill completely a darkened room. The first son brought straw, but could fill the room only halfway. The second brought sand, with the same result. "The third lit a candle. And the room was filled."

Galeano is the one lighting that candle.

Reprinted from Real Change News, Seattle

Invisible

By Austin Rathman

I'll tell you a secret:
I'm invisible.
Me and my friends
We figured it out.
One day it happened, two options en route
For those, like me, it happened by fault.
Lack of courage, strength, logic.
Don't forget reason
For others by failure (failure by you).
Sodom? Gomorrah? (it happened then, too).
Lessons not learned?
God's warnings!
Not heeded?
Disease of mankind
Recycles untreated.

Trial

By Kareem Ali

Summer rain
And tulips shagged in a monsoon of light
And swallows
Peeling back the skin of moon
Revealing the soggy
Arch and ark of evening.

And there you strolled
Crossing a forgotten stream
Where the ashes of
Remembrance remained
Collecting in your eyes
Almost
Like rare coins.



Your donations through the end of July
are matched 1:1 - \$20 becomes \$40!

A MEAL, a smile, A HUG, a listening ear -



these fill our plates and hearts at Sisters. Join our Full Plate Project this summer, because everyone deserves a Full Plate.

SISTERS
OF THE
ROAD



133 NW Sixth Ave.
Portland, OR 97209
503 222 5694
www.sistersoftheroad.org

Real food for real people.

3029 SE 21st Avenue
(503) ORGANIC (674-2642)
SNAP/EBT accepted
Weekly Farmers' Market, Wednesdays 2-7pm
www.peoples.coop

people's
FOOD CO-OP