

Batchelder Award Acceptance Speech

A Crazy Mad Love Story

By Françoise Bui



Françoise Bui is Executive Editor of Delacorte Press, an imprint of Random House Children's Books, which won the 2011 Mildred L. Batchelder Award for *A Time of Miracles*, written by Anne-Laure Bondoux, translated by Y. Maudet.

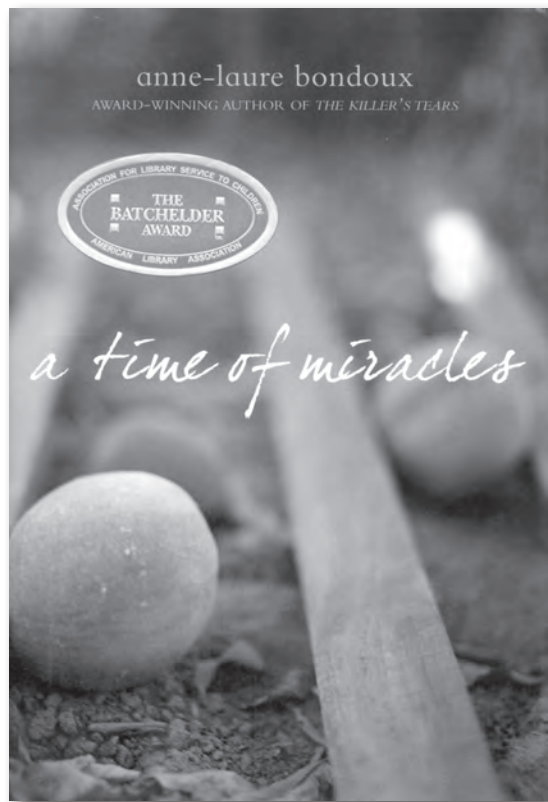
Good morning, everyone. As an editor, of course, I'm always reading, looking for the next amazing manuscript, or, in this case, the next amazing foreign-language book to acquire—one that makes me go, "Wow! This is special."

And I don't mean another high-concept trilogy, but rather a novel that commands attention because of its originality, arresting voice, and literary merit. *A Time of Miracles* is such a novel. I read the French edition when it came out in 2009 and was blown away.

Anne-Laure Bondoux wanted to write a crazy mad love story—one where reality and fiction blur, where truth and lies interweave. She also wanted to anchor her story in a war-torn region. The Caucasus, that vast stretch of land at the border of Europe and Asia that encompasses the former Soviet republics, has a complicated history, and is not on most people's radar.

However in the summer of 2008, as Anne-Laure was writing, the entire region made headlines because of the South Ossetia War that pitted Russia against Georgia. Anne-Laure took this as an omen. She thought readers now stood a better chance of being familiar with the setting of her book, which opens in Georgia in the early 1990s. But more important than familiarity with the setting, Anne-Laure knew everything hinged on the vitality of her characters.

Blaise, the young boy who narrates the story, and Gloria, the woman who cares for him, are fleeing the civil unrest in Georgia, making their way toward France, where Gloria says they will find safe haven. Their trek, on foot, lasts five long years. During that time, we witness the incredible bond between them and the love that keeps them going through the roughest times. We come to realize that Gloria hasn't told Blaise the real story of his birth and past, and eventually he begins to question things too. There's a beautiful moment in the novel when



Gloria says to him, "I never tell a lie. I may embellish things from time to time, that's all. There's nothing wrong with making up stories to make life more bearable."

A Time of Miracles sparkles because of its two main characters and their resilient spirit. Theirs is an unforgettable journey, where the good, the bad, and the ugly of human nature are encountered.

Anne-Laure's heartbreaking tale of exile, sacrifice, and survival is most definitely a crazy mad love story. And it reminds us to be aware of, as well as kinder to, those who continue to be displaced the world over.

I am thrilled that *A Time of Miracles* received four starred reviews. And getting this year's Batchelder is icing on the cake. My thanks to ALSC and to Batchelder Chair Susan Faust and her fellow committee members for the award. It goes a long way in bringing attention to novels in translation, and whether they hail from France, Denmark, or the Netherlands, as the ones recognized this year do, there are many exquisite stories from abroad waiting to be discovered. I'm very proud to bring a few of these to readers in the U.S.

Thanks very much! 🐾