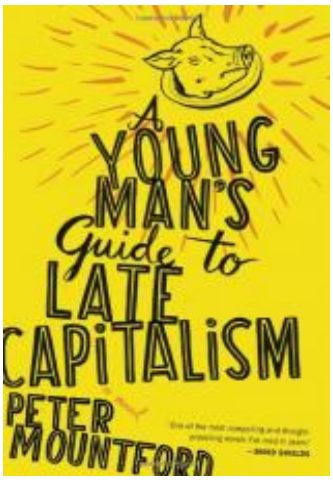
A Young Man

by Peter Mountford



About the Book

On his first assignment for a rapacious hedge fund, Gabriel embarks to Bolivia at the end of 2005 to ferret out insider information about the plans of the controversial president-elect. If Gabriel succeeds, he will get a bonus that would make him secure for life. Standing in his way are his headstrong mother, herself a survivor of Pinochet?s Chile, and Gabriel?s new love interest, the president?s passionate press liaison. Caught in a growing web of lies and questioning his own role in profiting from an impoverished people, Gabriel sets into motion a terrifying plan that could cost him the love of all those he holds dear.

In the tradition of Martin Amis, Joshua Ferris, and Sam Lipsyte --- set against the stunning mountainous backdrop of La Paz and interspersed with Bolivia?s sad history of stubborn survival --- Peter Mountford examines the critical choices a young man makes as his world closes in on him.

Discussion Guide

1. ?Gabriel had noticed that of all the cardinal sins, greed was the most uniformly maligned? (p. 177). Why does money become so important to Gabriel? How does his relationship to wealth change over the course of the novel, and what conflicts arise in his relationships because of it? What sort of commentary is Mountford providing on our current global economy?

2. Gabriel?s mother is Chilean and his father is Russian --- how important is Gabriel?s ethnicity to his identity and how does it affect his choices? Gabriel goes to Bolivia posing as a journalist and speaks Spanish fluently enough to pass himself off as a native. Why does Gabriel need to do so much posturing? What does it say about him as a character?

3. From the beginning, Gabriel takes a very calculating approach to getting his job done. How do you see his maneuverings evolve as the story moves along? Discuss how the book could be read as a coming-of-age novel, despite

the fact that Gabriel is much older than most classic protagonists of this genre.

4. There are protestors in the background from the beginning of the novel. What are they protesting? Later in the novel, when Gabriel gets close to some of the miners? demonstrations, he ?took a step back, not wanting to be too near, but he lingered, out of curiosity? (p. 130). What happens to Gabriel because of this curiosity and how is the event that follows emblematic of his greater conflicts?

5. Why is it important that Evo Morales is an indigenous candidate? How familiar were you with Bolivian politics before you read **A Young Man?s Guide to Late Capitalism**? What did you learn? Did you see any parallels in U.S. politics?

6. Discuss the choices Gabriel makes in the last third of the novel that bring him to where he ends up. How did you react? How did your feelings toward Gabriel change, or not change?

7. ?How incredible that the biggest threat to his relationship with Lenka --- and therefore his work in Bolivia itself --- would be a bellboy in an ill-fitting tuxedo jacket and lopsided bow tie? (p. 142). How is Gabriel?s relationship with Lenka inextricable from his work?

8. Mountford creates such strong supporting female characters in Lenka, Fiona, Priya, Gabriel?s mother --- discuss their roles in the novel and how each interacts with Gabriel.

9. Talk about La Paz as a character. How well did Mountford develop this sense of place for you and how did he achieve it?

10. David Guterson (author of **Snow Falling on Cedars**) said about **A Young Man?s Guide to Late Capitalism**, ?Peter Mountford has something important to say about the ambiguous moral ground where the personal meets the political.? Where do you see this in the book, and what do you think Mountford is trying to say?

Author Bio

While writing about economics in Ecuador for a nonprofit think tank, Peter Mountford noticed his byline read "senior associate" for a hedge fund he'd never heard of. It turned out the think tank was running the hedge fund out of its back office --- inspiration for **A Young Man's Guide to Late Capitalism**. Mountford has lived in Washington, D.C., New York, and Los Angeles, as well as Scotland, Sri Lanka, Ecuador, and Southern Mexico. His fiction has appeared in *Best New American Voices 2008*, *Boston Review*, and *Conjunctions*.

Critical Praise

"Mountford's powerful novel avoids easy judgements as it explores how money can take over one's life."

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