MARÍA CRISTINA RAMOS
ARGENTINA’S WRITER CANDIDATE
FOR HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN 2020 AWARD
María Cristina Ramos was born in San Rafael, Mendoza, in 1952. In 1978, she moved to Neuquén, in the Argentine Patagonia. She completed her teaching degree in Literature and won the Leopoldo Marechal first prize in the region of Cuyo, organised by renowned author Antonio Di Benedetto just one year before the beginning of the infamous last dictatorship, when he was detained and disappeared.

She has participated as a trainer in reading programmes both nationally and regionally since 1983.

Her first book for children—selected and published by Graciela Montes—was Un sol para tu sombrero (A sun for your hat), continuously reprinted since and currently edited by Random House Mondadori.

In 1990, her short story Las lagartijas no vuelan (Lizards can’t fly) was awarded a Special Mention at the Antoniorrobles Latin American Awards, organised by IBBY México, and in 1991, Coronas y galeras (Crowns and top-hats) won the first prize in the same event.

In 1997, De barrio somos (Our neighbourhood) was shortlisted for Norma’s Fundalectura award, and in the same year, Norma published Ruedamares, pírate de la mar bravía (Ruedamares, a pirate of the raging sea). Also in 1997, her book Un bosque en cada esquina (A forest on every corner) won the first prize in the National Contest for Children’s Fantasy Books, sponsored by UNICEF and the Secretariat of Culture, Sociedad Argentina de Lectura (Argentine Reading Association), and other institutions. In 2006, Mientras duermen las piedras (While the stones sleep) was shortlisted for the 3rd International Anaya Prize for Literature for Children and Young Adults.

Several of Ramos’ works have been selected for Argentina’s community libraries’ collections and by SEP in Mexico. They are also mentioned in book lists selected by Fundalectura, El Banco del libro (the Book Bank) and Argentina’s Ministry of Education every year. Ramos’ books have often been awarded mentions in ALIJA, the Argentinian IBBY National section. Three of them were translated into Chinese, Corean, and Portuguese.

Her work is presently being studied in postgraduate courses, master’s degrees, and literature seminars in Argentinian universities.

Since 2002 she has been running Ruedamares publishing house. Since 2017, she runs ‘Lecturas y navegantes’ (Readings and navigators), a training program for the promotion of literature reading in public schools in the Argentine Patagonia, sponsored by SM Foundation.

La casa del aire. Taller literario (The House in the Air. A Literary Workshop) is her fourth and latest non-fiction book, aimed for teachers and reading promoters. In this book, Ramos offers some of her experiences at the reading and writing workshops for children she organised for 25 years, after attending workshops by Professor Nicolás Bratosevich, first in Patagonia and later in Buenos Aires.

Maria Cristina Ramos has received national and international distinctions. In 2016 she received the Ibero-American SM Award for Children’s and Young Adults’ Literature. The jury commended ‘her craftsmanship and her profound respect for her readers, characters, and the reality she recreates’, highlighted ‘her genuine and independent authorial voice’, and acknowledged ‘the subtle incorporation of values and cultural practices of indigenous people’.

Name: María Cristina Ramos
National ID Number: 10206854
Address: Eureli N° 3505 Barrio Huilliches (8300)
Neuquén, Argentina
Telephone Number: 054 299 4461117
E-mail address: mariacristinaramosguzman@gmail.com
Website: http://mariacristinaramosblog.blogspot.com/
Introducing María Cristina Ramos to a jury is an opportunity for its distinguished members to meet a renowned and prestigious author in the field of children’s literature in Spanish, a woman who lives by and for literature.

In a world full of falsehood, hastiness and frenzy, María Cristina Ramos’ carefully crafted, ‘slowly-cooked’ texts—enhanced by her commitment to the transformation of human beings and society—are a gift for her readers. Just like the great masters of literature, Ramos seems to write in the most natural and simplest of ways, and with the utmost honesty, while displaying the highest literary quality. Ramos’ authorial voice, both genuine and independent, is not conditioned by any aesthetical, social, or political fads. This is a voice that subtly takes in the cultural values and practices of the peoples from her native land, the Argentine Patagonia. Through her work, María Cristina Ramos contributes to the visibility of indigenous boys and girls by making them the protagonists of her literature. A special note must be made on her meaningful work Azul la cordillera (Blue, the mountain chain). This highly poetic book affirms a commitment to the realities of a native culture. Here, learning to read and write—and literature itself—become a bridge to access the culture of an ancient people.

Because poetry runs through her veins, Maria Cristina Ramos helps all readers—especially the youngest ones—approach this world and use it to conceive reality from a poetic perspective, like a child’s game—i.e., unfiltered, connecting with the essence and depth of existence. Thus, starting with rhythm and by means of a strong poetic sensitivity, as she turns daily experiences into rhyme and song, the writer introduces children to the art of reading as a source of enjoyment and amazement.

The literature of María Cristina Ramos casts a true and sensitive light on Latin American reality. Her craftsmanship reflects her deep respect towards her readers, her characters, and the reality she recreates. Her works provide a unique experience, offering readers’ sensitivities a moving and enriching aesthetic perception.

Ramos is clearly committed to literature as a path that reveals painful aspects of the human condition.

Maria Cristina Ramos displays a remarkable skill as an explorer of genres and forms through her high quality work, aimed at a wide range of readers.

This letter would be incomplete should I fail to mention—aside from her literary merits—Ramos’ indefatigable activity in promoting reading in the most remote Patagonian areas and her dedication to training rural teachers, her contribution to reflection and literary criticism through her writing and pedagogical planning, and her personal commitment to the book industry through her own publishing house, Ruedamares.

I am honoured at the chance to introduce an author who helps transform social realities through poetry that inspires commitment and hope.
Silk Threads to Sustain Childhood. The Poetics of María Cristina Ramos

Written by María José Troglia. Included in the book Para tejer el nido. Poéticas de autor en la literatura argentina para niños. (Knitting the Nest. The Poetics of Authorship in Argentinian Literature for Children.)

With the subtle threads of language

This work is an approach to María Cristina Ramos’ poetic and narrative work, an attempt to analyse the recurrent elements that help her give shape to a social meaning in literature, the possibility of creating networks of meaning as shelters for childhood, understanding children’s vulnerability in order to sustain the asymmetry in our relationship with them, and thus provide children with strategies to speak out and of themselves, as Zelmanovich (2003) said.

Ramos’ work stages this asymmetry creating a universe of the small, the minimal, the mild. This universe, however, is highly supportive and involves an ability to transform the world or make up new dreams when none are left.

Her texts reveal a strong commitment to a world that, however vast and alien, can always be read, allowing us—as Ramos (2006) herself says—to believe that transformation is possible, to face the signs that reality is revealing itself to us. This is an attempt to recover the way children read, which stands on a thin line that separates the known from the unknown, the tiny from the disproportionate, silence from words, life from death. This study thus attempts to explore the creases in a work that speaks about nets, and knits them using the subtle threads of language.

“What is wound in the little things of the world”

An overview of Ramos’ poetic work invariably shows a set of signifiers building up a tiny, delicate, even invisible universe that, though minimal, can produce a number of sensations. For instance, there are no large trees in her forests—if any; they can only be noticed by means of their twigs, wisps, petals, leaves, seeds, or little flowers:

“All the bugs in the neighborhood are sticking their heads from behind a curtain of petals, from the sledge of a leaf, from under a seed.” (2006a: 34)

“I’ll pour on it
A drop of apple flower
Cause scents can sooth
And petals help recover.” (2008)

These elements suggest we can discover the core of a secret—the secret of nature, revealed through an innuendo of shadows, transience, silences, and reflections. At the centre of this world lies something the size of a cricket’s heart; in fact, this is the title of one of Ramos’ books:

Corazón de grillo (Cricket heart), a homage to Conrado Nafó, a writer who knew poetry and children very well. A secret this size is easier to grasp for a child who is starting to find their place in the vastness of the universe they inhabit. Ramos’ secrets can be shared, and children are invited—and so are animals—to participate in the dance, open only to those who showed their treasures and let themselves be seen.

“The best thing about a secret is sharing it.” (2011)

It may have been of white thread
The little dream she dreamt
With eyes coming and going
With secrets the two shared. (2009b: 35)

Additionally, these elements help shape a world that serves as the base for a sort of nest made of seeds, buds, feather flakes, sticks, leaves, petals. A cradle covered by a delicate little transparent sheet: the protective weightless sheet of words:

“Little balls of fluff
Knitted with branches;
Warm home for baby bird to lay...
But I’d better not say.” (2010)

Yolanda Reyes (1999) speaks precisely about ‘providing a nest,’ or sowing meaning for children to harvest it. The nest is the buffered soft background we can all build to share children with dwellers. It is not compact, though, but full of cracks that let light and sound in. It is rodless; it is as large as we want, need, or can afford it to be. It is protected, yet not too high for us to leave it for too long—it is a place to share with others. It is a floor to stand on or to take impulse from. After all, literature has a lot to do with flying.

Flying is also present in Ramos’ texts: actual, symbolic, impossible flights by those who can’t actually fly—like elephants:

“It’s ears swing;
Rock, and stretch
Preventing to be wings
When nobody’s watching.” (1999: 34)

Although they sometimes can:

“The toad was lying:
Today I will
Then he flew away.” (2005: 22)

“She flew again and again since then. She flew every day, only to return to her world of ordinary lizards. A world where her sisters insisted every now and then: “Lizards! Lizards can’t fly.”” (2001: 30)

We should build nests and dare to dwell in them with children, but also leave holes in its fabric so that doubt and uncertainty can filter in, so that more questions are raised and art and play can appear.

Elena Stajich (2008) says:

“Childhood cannot be wholly encompassed, but it can and must be received, welcomed, and nested. If we are to provide an open space for childhood, I can’t think of a cosier place than a nest made of words, poems, stories, pictures, music. Perhaps art is the language of choice for building such nest, and the network that best supports children by not imposing them, giving them a chance to unfold instead”.

Moreover, a nest can be built with anything, with whatever we have at hand, as long as it is fuelled by the idea that a secret is wound in the small things of the world, as Ramos herself said. The doves in San Pedro are a proof of this, “knitting nails, knitting iron”—as Laura Devetach said—to make their nests, while Mar del Plata’s cathedral was being built.

Why is it knitting wings if it walks on its feet?

“Childhood cannot be wholly encompassed, but it can and must be received, welcomed, and nested. If we are to provide an open space for childhood, I can’t think of a cosier place than a nest made of words, poems, stories, pictures, music.”

Nests are related to nets, to weaves, to fabric. Silk threads, vegetable threads—thin but highly resistant—hold together Ramos’ poetics. In order to weave the fabric that can hold the world’s stage, as Perla Zelmanovich (2003) says, you should be moved by desire, which involves holding something to be conquered. Here lies the future, and here stands the poetics of the possible, of hope, inscribed in Ramos’ texts.

Consequently, for any transmission to take place between an educator and a student, the key lies in providing the latter with the necessary references and meanings that will allow them to make a difference of their own, i.e., their own words. This is where asymmetry lies: in protecting and acknowledging a child’s vulnerability. Hence the need to think and act upon our current difficulties as adults in order to sustain the asymmetry for children as a background to that protective and sheltering pattern of meanings.

Yet in order to make sense of the world in one’s terms, a desire to see it together is necessary but in turn, such desire needs to be conquered. To do so, reassuring—which involves experiencing other people’s desires, be it peers or adults—is a necessary condition. Having a glimpse of a single desire amounts to opening up to a new dimension where things to come are possible.” (Zelmanovich, 2003)

If Ramos did not believe in things to come and that this is where the social dimension lies—in the soft but hard-wearing fabric we weave with one another—we would not have known about the elephant who plans to sail a river on a boat made of cloth. Elephants are massive.

“If he was this small, / he’d sleep among the ants’ green sheets, / and he’d be able to swing / from the tamarind trees.” (2004: 15)

Together, the ants use spiders’ silk threads to weave a wicker twig boat for Eleazar so he can finally sail away feeling almost light and small. As long as the elephant is innocent enough, like a child, and as long as the leaves are closely interwoven, the journey will be possible.

Granny Ant knits a lovely dress for her granddaughter using vegetable threads (2009b): Gusanita (female little worm) knits wings but no one knows why and the garment she has woven looks like two petals (2009b): Her Granny doesn’t know her sewing thread’s the size the girl just needs to find her little dreaming eyes (2009b): The frog now spins her white silk thread to weave more dreams

1 Teacher at the National University of Río Negro and the National University of Comahue. Founding member of Asociación civil Juntajóvenes, Redes Sociales para la Promoción de la lectura y la escritura.

2 Henceforth, all quotes are by María Cristina Ramos and can be identified by year of publication. Some pages from certain children’s books are not numbered. At the end of this work, the quoted texts have been arranged chronologically.
A similar procedure is followed in Mientras duermen las piedras, a story about a family and a community in poor living conditions. A lack of electricity and sometimes food are the driving force for a new project. Once again, Ramos avoids a pitiful look providing an alternative based on the creation of community networks. The novel, told from a girl’s point of view, suggests that change might become possible through cooperation, solidarity, the fight for social rights, strengthening bonds among people, and—why not—happiness. According to Blanco, this attitude is based on an ethical framework in which solidarity and love become the entrance to a world where true communication and happiness are possible. This is highly significant in uninspiring or unmotivating contexts. The interesting thing about this novel is that it explores complex social issues without introducing unbearably poignant scenes or using literature to moralise or ‘teach values’—it just states that everybody has the right to a better life, to happiness:

‘On our way back, we played in the river for a while and, when we got back home, we finally saw something like green fluff on one of the furrows. In spite of our tiredness, in spite of our forgetfulness, in spite of my youngest brother’s stomping feet, the joyful green of parsley was sprouting.’

Both novels are fragments of reality that, as Ramos says, reveal a glimpse of brightness in what’s been broken, so that we can recover whatever may have been lost.

‘With placid waters I end my sorrors’

If I had to describe Ramos’ poetry in a few words, I would say that it is a poetry of ‘ending sorrow’, since joy is present in both her poetry and her narrative work. Such joy can be found by digging in hidden places in the world, in the small things in daily life that comprise the experience of living.

A poetry of the small, the light, the imperceptible. Ramos’ work holds a secret that is available to all, but especially to children who are not afraid to get their hands dirty with mud, to go into the river, to climb high on trees, or peep into trunks’ holes, touching bugs or collecting petals, twigs, feathers and foam. Ramos’ poetry uses diminutive forms not because she’s minimising her readers, but because she knows that in order to make a difference, you need to point to asymmetries, giving children the possibility to utter their own words.

Finally, a few words from the author summarizing the ideas above:

‘This should be a personal reason: to visit poetry—its rhythm games, its metaphorical synthesis, its view of the world, the music at its core.’

A similar procedure is followed in Mientras duermen las piedras, a story about a family and a community in poor living conditions. A lack of electricity and sometimes food are the driving force for a new project. Once again, Ramos avoids a pitiful look providing an alternative based on the creation of community networks. The novel, told from a girl’s point of view, suggests that change might become possible through cooperation, solidarity, the fight for social rights, strengthening bonds among people, and—why not—happiness. According to Blanco, this attitude is based on an ethical framework in which solidarity and love become the entrance to a world where true communication and happiness are possible. This is highly significant in uninspiring or unmotivating contexts. The interesting thing about this novel is that it explores complex social issues without introducing unbearably poignant scenes or using literature to moralise or ‘teach values’—it just states that everybody has the right to a better life, to happiness:

‘On our way back, we played in the river for a while and, when we got back home, we finally saw something like green fluff on one of the furrows. In spite of our tiredness, in spite of our forgetfulness, in spite of my youngest brother’s stomping feet, the joyful green of parsley was sprouting.’

Both novels are fragments of reality that, as Ramos says, reveal a glimpse of brightness in what’s been broken, so that we can recover whatever may have been lost.

‘With placid waters I end my sorrors’

If I had to describe Ramos’ poetry in a few words, I would say that it is a poetry of ‘ending sorrow’, since joy is present in both her poetry and her narrative work. Such joy can be found by digging in hidden places in the world, in the small things in daily life that comprise the experience of living.

A poetry of the small, the light, the imperceptible. Ramos’ work holds a secret that is available to all, but especially to children who are not afraid to get their hands dirty with mud, to go into the river, to climb high on trees, or peep into trunks’ holes, touching bugs or collecting petals, twigs, feathers and foam. Ramos’ poetry uses diminutive forms not because she’s minimising her readers, but because she knows that in order to make a difference, you need to point to asymmetries, giving children the possibility to utter their own words.

Finally, a few words from the author summarizing the ideas above:

‘This should be a personal reason: to visit poetry—its rhythm games, its metaphorical synthesis, its view of the world, the music at its core.’

A similar procedure is followed in Mientras duermen las piedras, a story about a family and a community in poor living conditions. A lack of electricity and sometimes food are the driving force for a new project. Once again, Ramos avoids a pitiful look providing an alternative based on the creation of community networks. The novel, told from a girl’s point of view, suggests that change might become possible through cooperation, solidarity, the fight for social rights, strengthening bonds among people, and—why not—happiness. According to Blanco, this attitude is based on an ethical framework in which solidarity and love become the entrance to a world where true communication and happiness are possible. This is highly significant in uninspiring or unmotivating contexts. The interesting thing about this novel is that it explores complex social issues without introducing unbearably poignant scenes or using literature to moralise or ‘teach values’—it just states that everybody has the right to a better life, to happiness:

‘On our way back, we played in the river for a while and, when we got back home, we finally saw something like green fluff on one of the furrows. In spite of our tiredness, in spite of our forgetfulness, in spite of my youngest brother’s stomping feet, the joyful green of parsley was sprouting.’

Both novels are fragments of reality that, as Ramos says, reveal a glimpse of brightness in what’s been broken, so that we can recover whatever may have been lost.

‘With placid waters I end my sorrors’

If I had to describe Ramos’ poetry in a few words, I would say that it is a poetry of ‘ending sorrow’, since joy is present in both her poetry and her narrative work. Such joy can be found by digging in hidden places in the world, in the small things in daily life that comprise the experience of living.

A poetry of the small, the light, the imperceptible. Ramos’ work holds a secret that is available to all, but especially to children who are not afraid to get their hands dirty with mud, to go into the river, to climb high on trees, or peep into trunks’ holes, touching bugs or collecting petals, twigs, feathers and foam. Ramos’ poetry uses diminutive forms not because she’s minimising her readers, but because she knows that in order to make a difference, you need to point to asymmetries, giving children the possibility to utter their own words.

Finally, a few words from the author summarizing the ideas above:

‘This should be a personal reason: to visit poetry—its rhythm games, its metaphorical synthesis, its
INTERVIEW

Published by Fundación Leer (Read Foundation) in their website [https://www.leer.org]

María Cristina Ramos is a writer and literature professor. She has been the coordinator in numerous literary workshops for children, teenagers and young adults, and she is involved in teacher training. She has also coordinated the “Train the Trainer” programme for coordinators of Children’s Literature Workshops for the Department of Teachers’ Training and Permanent Education in the Education Council of the Province of Neuquén, Argentina. In 1987 and 1988, she was the coordinator of the Reading and Writing Plan, which was part of the Community Libraries Department, also in the Province of Neuquén. This position required her to lead workshops in different districts around the province, as well as being in charge of the ‘Leer es salud’ programme (Reading is good for you), in small libraries and hospitals. In 2001, María Cristina was a trainer in the ‘Creating Reading Ties’ programme, organised by the National Commission of Community Libraries. Furthermore, she has collaborated with librarians in different towns in the provinces of Neuquén, Río Negro, and Mendoza.

Fundación Leer: When did you start writing for children?

María Cristina Ramos: When my first daughter was born. But truthfully, I always felt a close connection with children, since I worked as a teacher for many years. It is really moving to witness how children ‘read’ the world, and discover it little by little, as they grow up. That glow moved me into writing.

FL: Do you think we should talk about children’s literature or is it simply literature? And in any case, how would you define children’s literature?

MCR: It is important to focus on the possibilities a child has to build everything an adult reader builds when they receive a text. Of course, there are infinite nuances, but in general there is a significant gap between a child and an adult, as regards their life experiences. Anyway, children’s literature is, first and foremost, literature. The age of our target audience does not justify a superficial or sloppy treatment of the material. On the contrary, the idea is to try and delve into its artistic intent and propose an encounter with the reading experience, without patronising or underestimating our readers.

FL: In order to write stories or poetry for children, is it necessary to write about the children’s world?

MCR: No. Literature is a window to the outside world and to human beings’ inner worlds. I think children are interested in everything. They are curious and look out that window into life in all its forms. That curiosity leads them to decipher this strange thing we call ‘adulthood’.

FL: Are there topics for children and topics for adults? Can you talk about just anything when it comes to literature or is it simply literature? And in any case, how does literature have a function in that sense? I mean, if it has a concrete purpose at all...

MCR: Maybe it sublimly points out, underscores, and sheds light on the grey areas. It gives a voice to the unheard, both individually and socially. The aesthetic experience strikes personal chords in us that touch upon the collective unconscious. The search for the aesthetic is an expression of freedom. Moreover, as any activity that pivots on a quest to unfold the sanest part in us, it dignifies us as human beings and it saves us from self-destruction.

FL: What is your purpose? What are your objectives when you start writing a story?

MCR: None. It is only once the story has made enough progress that I take a critical look to what’s behind the scenes, as so to see what else should get in the spotlight or left in the shadows.

FL: How much space does poetry occupy in the field of children’s literature?

MCR: Sometimes it appears timidly among other more commonly used resources. There’s a certain fear from mediators and teachers before poetry, I think it is connected to the unpredictable nature of the poetic discourse. Poetry can be an instant ray of light, a drop of music, a pure and free playfulness with words. It can be a subtle inner

Literature is a window to the outside world and to human beings’ inner worlds. I think children are interested in everything. They are curious and look out that window into life in all its forms. That curiosity leads them to decipher this strange thing we call ‘adulthood’.

Books provide an opportunity to dive in them until you find something that resonates with you at a deeply personal level. When schools allow for this exploration and foster freedom, they are opening doors and broadening horizons for children to value literature, thus helping ‘build’ readers.

FL: As a teacher and a trainer, what are your specific strategies to stimulate reading in children?

MCR: Those that entail inspiring group interactions in the game of words, those that feed the idea of connecting images with words, those where literature pushes children to delve into their imagination and progressively lead into a fruitful silence that encourages reading.

FL: How do you include topics that have to do with social exclusion or conflicts in children’s stories?

MCR: Each author develops their own alchemy. I think that it is a question of keeping a delicate balance between social awareness, and aesthetic realization. Besides, I do not think writing can be purposefully channelled towards a given objective. The author’s ideology becomes apparent, even when they are writing about topics that seem to be about things other than social issues or human oppression.

In any such situation, the underlying issue is that others are not considered valuable. The principle of respect for one another appears even in the most trivial communicational situations, such as a story about fish or buttons. Literature is metaphorisation. Only that, maybe, we have become used to accepting the explicit, the obvious. There is a lot of ‘consumer literature’ intended not to shake readers, not to demand an effort from them. I believe that a true artist will trust human nature and people’s power to overcome obstacles, as well as a lucid perspective and a desire for freedom. We throw our work into that sea of possibilities.

FL: Is there room in literature for the voices of different cultural stakeholders in our country?

MCR: I think there is little room, but at the same time it has become a more relevant spot, compared to years ago.

FL: In your opinion, what is the place of literature at school? What should it be?

MCR: School should create spaces for children to interact with literature. Teachers who remember their own childhood or teenage years, and the intimacy that you can develop with a book you love better understand how important it is to be in close contact with books. Books

provide an opportunity to dive in them until you find something that resonates with you at a deeply personal level. When schools allow for this exploration and foster freedom, they are opening doors and broadening horizons for children to value literature, thus helping ‘build’ readers.

FL: How much space does poetry occupy in the field of children’s literature?

MCR: Sometimes it appears timidly among other more commonly used resources. There’s a certain fear from mediators and teachers before poetry, I think it is connected to the unpredictable nature of the poetic discourse. Poetry can be an instant ray of light, a drop of music, a pure and free playfulness with words. It can be a subtle inner

resonance that evokes a time when words came from those who represented love, a time when language was made of sound and musiality, before we could get its meaning. Its contribution, however, is not equivalent to that of the narrative. You have to dare explore it, enjoy it, and make it available to children. Then, poetry takes off on its own.

FL: In your opinion, what is the role of poetry in children’s literature? What should it be?

MCR: School should create spaces for children to interact with literature. Teachers who remember their own childhood or teenage years, and the intimacy that you can develop with a book you love better understand how important it is to be in close contact with books. Books
Why ‘autumn butterfly’?

We receive the world from the hands of those surrounding us. The world is designed and valued according to the voices and the perspectives of those who are close to us.

Our way of looking at the world is shaped by those who define it around us in our daily lives through their way of naming, of asserting and denying; their ways of considering or disregarding, the forms in which they express love or lack of affection.

Family is an intimate territory of relationships, and it shapes our little ones. In it, children learn and they feed their curiosity; they develop skills and behaviours before they start school. Then comes the time of pencils and chalk, of lost erasers and notebooks, of eyes wide open to a blackboard horizon, of the school scenes that launch us into the adventure of literacy.

Some people say there is no time for literature, no time to read stories and poems that are distractions from what is important. Is literature really a detour from what’s important? Let’s give that a second thought.

Our perspective of the world keeps broadening, expanding, deepening, thanks to this live trail that is literature. Literature is a space where the author’s imagination meets children’s craving for imagery; it allows for children to become birds or inhabit a little corner where anything is possible. That space where fears and desires float, where there are characters that dare navigate unchartered waters, is and will be the indispensable sounding board to renew the desire to read. It is also a balm to mellow individual efforts made in order to read and write.

Reading out loud creates harmony, it cheers you up—it is a caress that shelters you. An important person in their lives—such as a teacher—reading out loud to children builds trust, consolidates ties, brings closeness and unites.

Even more to that point, frequent contact with the literary language contributes to enhance communicational skills, awakens verbal tools that sustain thought and imagination, and benefits group interaction by adding expressive nuances. Literature is also a platform for exploration to know and design the boundaries of our own subjectivity.

Our voice should be the best call for children, an irresistible invitation to delve into the world of reading. We need to muster all the expressiveness we are capable of: our skill to whisper, to exclaim, to use an appealing intonation for questions. During the breaks at school, in the teachers’ lounge, our voices grow small to whisper secrets or grow big to proclaim expectations, and those are the voices that read out loud. Sometimes those voices become dull and reluctant, as if they were detached from their inner fruitfulness. These countless possible nuances heard during the breaks at school should be available when it comes to reading.

It is true that poems have a core that contains their meaning, sustained by a fabric of images, metaphors and other rhetorical devices. The suggestions that lead to that meaning are scattered throughout their rhythmic structure: in the words chosen, in what each word evokes, in how one word is woven into the next one, how they are bound together by syntax, and in how language resources lend themselves to

Poetry burns under the sun

Mariposa de otoño (Autumn butterfly)

The butterfly dances
and burns – with the sun – sometimes,
flits and flies flaring in a swirl,
now still,
on a leaf that rocks it.

(...) It is past the hour of the scythe. The sun, now, convalesced.

Its warm tongue enveloped me. And then I said: “You persist.”

The butterfly dances, shudders, disappears.

Pablo Neruda (fragment)
Translated by Robert Arquie and William A. Sigler
Since the beginning of time, poetry has healed the wounds of the body and the soul. Accompanying readers into the world of poetry not only means enabling them to exercise the right to pleasure, but also implies generating encounters with the best in our literary cultural tradition.

the poetic quest. If we read a text intended to be soft in a hasty or rough manner, the text will lose those features.

A poem creates a special world endowed with a meaning, but it is also a sound unit, which contains a rhythmic structure, a musical beat, and a stream of cadences that leave a trace in children’s memories. That’s why, in the light of the text’s content, as readers we should try and find the most adequate tone to convey its meaning, and relish the words, with their consonant clusters and their vowel valleys. We can discover how fast to read a given stanza, and how slow to utter another one, how to play on speed to evoke the sensations that the poem suggests.

We read when we come back from the bottom of the text immersed in its meaning, which is built between the words’ pulse and our sensitivity. We read when the air in our breath can touch the text without hurting it. We read when we place ourselves between the text and our listeners, and we are able to blur our individuality to generate a space for meaning to keep resonating. We read when the flow of our voice is tempered, acknowledging low voices as part of a repertoire of intensities. We read when our voice pulses with the intent to share a ray of light, and chooses the right feathers so that poetry takes to the sky.

Reading Sana que sana (There, there): A healing process
Since the beginning of time, poetry has healed the wounds of the body and the soul. Accompanying readers into the world of poetry not only means enabling them to exercise the right to pleasure, but also implies generating encounters with the best in our literary cultural tradition.

Poetry is the dimension where we can approach our own true self and others, a space to transcend and recover from a fall. A poetic text is a different verbal territory, a fabric of words, a few lines, and a sensation or a feeling. That story, but when we read a poem, we receive it in a different way. Maybe, what we get is a bunch of words, a few lines, and a sensation or a feeling. Also, each of us may receive something different. Can anybody share what they understood, and see if you can help our little friend? Many hands rose. A boy, who was around ten, said in an utterly confident voice: ‘The thing is that the rooster had a problem: he was blue. So he couldn’t find a girlfriend. That’s why he decided to go up the roof and turn into a weathercock.’ The girl listened to him in absolute earnest and asked again: ‘And he stayed there, all alone?’ I attempted an explanation: ‘Let’s see… when we read a short story, we can retell that story, but when we read a poem, we receive it in a different way. Maybe, what we get is a bunch of words, a few lines, and a sensation or a feeling. Also, each of us may receive something different. Can anybody share what they understood, and see if you can help our little friend?’ Many hands rose. A boy, who was around ten, said in an utterly confident voice: ‘The thing is that the rooster had a problem: he was blue. So he couldn’t find a girlfriend. That’s why he decided to go up the roof and turn into a weathercock.’ The girl listened to him in absolute earnest and asked again: ‘And he stayed there, all alone?’

Memories of an encounter
Some time ago, I participated in an event with readers at Community Library 9 de Julio in San Martín de los Andes, in the Argentine Patagonia. The event was particularly moving, since the children’s teacher had generated a lot of expectations and the children’s eagerness to hear was symbolized by a respectful silence, eyes wide open, a whisper here and there, and a few fugitive sighs. There were some adults too, namely parents, reading coordinators, and librarians. I attempted an explanation: ‘I did not understand this time either.’ I attempted an explanation: ‘Let’s see… when we read a short story, we can retell that story, but when we read a poem, we receive it in a different way. Maybe, what we get is a bunch of words, a few lines, and a sensation or a feeling. Also, each of us may receive something different. Can anybody share what they understood, and see if you can help our little friend?’ Many hands rose. A boy, who was around ten, said in an utterly confident voice: ‘The thing is that the rooster had a problem: he was blue. So he couldn’t find a girlfriend. That’s why he decided to go up the roof and turn into a weathercock.’ The girl listened to him in absolute earnest and asked again: ‘And he stayed there, all alone?’

At this point the silence was like a snow avalanche. The gathering was organized with children from different schools who had read some of my books. Considering that they were between 6 and 12 years of age, I decided to read a poem called ‘El gallo azul’ (The blue rooster).

The event was particularly moving, since the children’s teacher had generated a lot of expectations and the children’s eagerness to hear was symbolized by a respectful silence, eyes wide open, a whisper here and there, and a few fugitive sighs. There were some adults too, namely parents, reading coordinators, and librarians. I attempted an explanation: ‘I did not understand this time either.’ I attempted an explanation: ‘Let’s see… when we read a short story, we can retell that story, but when we read a poem, we receive it in a different way. Maybe, what we get is a bunch of words, a few lines, and a sensation or a feeling. Also, each of us may receive something different. Can anybody share what they understood, and see if you can help our little friend?’ Many hands rose. A boy, who was around ten, said in an utterly confident voice: ‘The thing is that the rooster had a problem: he was blue. So he couldn’t find a girlfriend. That’s why he decided to go up the roof and turn into a weathercock.’ The girl listened to him in absolute earnest and asked again: ‘And he stayed there, all alone?’

The gathering was organized with children from different schools who had read some of my books. Considering that they were between 6 and 12 years of age, I decided to read a poem called ‘El gallo azul’ (The blue rooster).

The event was particularly moving, since the children’s teacher had generated a lot of expectations and the children’s eagerness to hear was symbolized by a respectful silence, eyes wide open, a whisper here and there, and a few fugitive sighs. There were some adults too, namely parents, reading coordinators, and librarians.

I read the poem the way I like to do it: going from the text to their eyes and back, refreshed by the feeling of being in that point of the mountain range that Patagonian lamas choose to perch. When I came to the end of the poem, I stopped and looked at them. Silence. One moment, two… At some point a 6-year old girl raised her hand calmly and left it hanging in mid-air.

‘I didn’t understand,’ she said.

‘OK… There are many ways to understand a poem, but if you want, we can read it again. Would you like that, children?’ They all agreed. I read it again. Silence. The same girl raised her hand again: ‘I did not understand this time either.’

Memories of an encounter
Some time ago, I participated in an event with readers at Community Library 9 de Julio in San Martín de los Andes, in the Argentine Patagonia. The gathering was organized with children from
and possibly in pain. What should I do to break this silence? How could I go on? As a shrewd teacher, experience tells me that silence has to be treasured too, so I waited. Another boy with curly hair and wind-kissed cheeks, who was around 6, stood up and proclaimed: ‘No! He was blue so he went up the roof to look further so that he could find a hen that is blue, just like him...’

I was happy then and I am happy now, remembering what happened in that gathering. I am pleased to see that I knew better and waited for the girl’s question to resonate with the group and find its path.

It is possible to analyse reading through what those children expressed. At first, the girl tormented by the ending of the poem was the only one that captured the deep meaning of what was not said in the poem, because the poem points out to being different and to loneliness as its consequence. What did she mean when she said ‘I did not understand’ in this context? Did she mean ‘I didn’t understand the text’ or ‘I don’t understand how someone can tell a story with that ending?’ At her age, a desirable ending is a happy ending, which provides compensation. However, as we know, not every story has a happy ending.

On the other hand, the other children contributed in their own way. The first one did not perceive the ending as a conflict, staying on the roof was fine for him. The other boy, on the contrary, did perceive the idea of loneliness, but found a possible resolution to avoid getting upset about a character that is different from the rest and therefore has to endure loneliness. Literary reading unleashes scenes that are as intense as this one. From them, we get glimpses of the meaning that provides guidance in the complex and progressive construction of each reader’s individual subjectivity.

If we give in to the temptation of hastily intervening and fail to yield the space for the text and each listener’s world to come in contact, part of what is dormant in the text will not be realised. Mediators are the ones who prepare the scene for that encounter to happen: they select the book and the occasion, they offer their voice and sensitivity, they move as tightrope walkers between silence and words. They make themselves available for children to ask questions and wait for them to take the steps to discovery at their own pace, illuminated by literature.

A poem creates a special world endowed with a meaning, but it is also a sound unit, which contains a rhythmic structure, a musical beat, and a stream of cadences that leave a trace in children’s memories.

- First prize in Poetry in the literary contest ‘Leopoldo Marechal’, in the region of Cuyo. 1975
- Honourable mention for Las lagartijas no vuelan in the Antonio Robles Latin American contest organised by IBBY México. 1990
- First prize for De coronas y galeras in the Antonio Robles Latin American contest organised by IBBY México. 1991
- ALIJA Honour List 1991 for Un sol para tu sombrero
- Destacados ALIJA Award (for outstanding books, writers, illustrators and publishing houses selected by ALIJA, the Argentinian IBBY National section) for Azul la cordillera (Blue, the mountain chain). Category: Text. 1996
- Finalist at the Norma-Fundalectura Children and Young People Latin American Literature Awards in Colombia, for the book De barrio somos (Our neighbourhood). 1997
- Winner of the Children’s Fantasy National Award in the category of Poetry for the book Un bosque en cada esquina, Sponsored by UNICEF, the Argentinian Secretariat of Culture, Asociación Argentina de Lectura (Argentine Reading Association) and other institutions. 1997
- Honour List in San Miguel de Tucumán Secretariat of Culture for Del amor nacen los ríos. Province of Tucumán, Argentina. 1998
- Destacados ALIJA Award for Del amor nacen los ríos. Category: Recreation of oral texts. 2000
- Pregonero a Especialista award for promoting children’s literature, by Fundación El libro. 2002
- Finalist in the 3rd International Anaya Award for Mientras duermen las piedras (While the stones sleep). 2006.
- Destacados ALIJA Award for La escalera. Category: Poetry. 2009
- Destacados ALIJA Honourable Mention for La luna lleva un silencio (The moon holds silence). Category: Poetry. 2010
- La hormiguita viajera Children and Young Adults National and Latin American Literature Award for National Educator in Literature for Children and Young Adults. 2014
- Destacados ALIJA Award for Dentro de una palabra. Category: Poetry. 2014
- 12th Ibero-American SM Award for Children and Young Adults’ Award. 2016
BIBLIOGRAPHY

‘The ink was fresh, so I read on tiptoe.’

María Cristina Ramos
From La secreta sílaba del beso
(The Secret Syllable of Kiss)

BOOKS FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG ADULTS

Un sol para tu sombrero (A sun for your hat)
(Buenos Aires, Libros del quirquincho, 1988)
(Buenos Aires, Sudamericana, 1999)

Cuentos de la Buena Suerte (Tales of good luck)
(Buenos Aires, Alfaguara, 1991)
(Neuquén, Ruedamares, 2011)

De papel te espero (Made of waiting-for-you paper)
(Buenos Aires, Sudamericana, 1991)
(Buenos Aires, Sudamericana, 2011)

El árbol de la lluvia (The rain tree)
(Buenos Aires, Alfaguara, 1993)
(Buenos Aires, Alfaguara, 1997)

Azu la cordillera (Blue the mountain chain)
(Buenos Aires, Sudamericana, 1995)
(Buenos Aires, Norma, 2006)
(Neuquén, Ruedamares, 2017)

El libro de Ratonio (The book of Mousiebald)
(Buenos Aires, Alfaguara, 1995)
(Neuquén, Ruedamares, 2014)

De barrio somos (Our neighbourhood)
(Buenos Aires, Bogotá, Norma, 1997)
(Buenos Aires, Planeta, 2017)

Un bosque en cada esquina (A forest on every corner)
(Buenos Aires, Sudamericana, 1997)

Ruedamares, Pirata de la mar bravía
(Ruedamares, a pirate of the raging sea)
(Bogotá, Norma, 1997)
(Buenos Aires, Norma, 2006)
(Buenos Aires, Siete Vacas, 2007)
(Neuquén, Ruedamares, 2017)

Del amor nacen los ríos (From love are rivers born)
(Buenos Aires, Sudamericana, 1998)

Belisario y el violín (Belisario and the violin)
(Buenos Aires, Alfaguara, 1999)
(Buenos Aires, Loqueleo, 2016)

Las lagartijas no vuelan (Lizards can’t fly)
(Buenos Aires, Sudamericana, 2001)

Cuentos del bosque (Tales from the forest)
(Buenos Aires, Santillana, 2001)
(Neuquén, Editorial Ruedamares, 2013)

Las sombras del Gato (The cat’s shadows)
(Bogotá, Panamericana editorial, 2002)

Maíces de silencio (Kernels of silence)
(Neuquén, Editorial Ruedamares, 2013)
(Madrid, SM, 2018)

Corazón de grillo (Cricket heart)
(Neuquén, Editorial Ruedamares, 2013)

Belisario y los espejos de agua (Belisario and the water mirrors)
(Buenos Aires, Alfaguara, 2003)
(Buenos Aires, Loqueleo, 2017)

Eleazar y el río (Eleazar and the river)
(Buenos Aires, Ediciones Eldéu, 2004)

La rama de azúcar (The sugar branch)
(Buenos Aires, Santillana, 2004)
(Córdoba, Comunicarte, 2008)

Papelitos (Little pieces of paper)
(México, Fondo de Cultura Económico, 2005)

La luna lleva un silencio (The moon holds silence)
(Madrid, Anaya, 2005)
(Buenos Aires, Anaya Grupo Editor, 2010)

Barcos en la lluvia (Boats in the rain)
(México, Fondo de Cultura Económico, 2007)

Historias de hormiguero (Tales from the ant’s nest)
(Buenos Aires, Siete Vacas, 2007)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Libro</th>
<th>Editorial</th>
<th>Año</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dentro de una palabra</td>
<td>едак, Sudamericana</td>
<td>2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cordelia y los arañijos</td>
<td>едак, Ruedamares</td>
<td>2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El rey que no sabía soñar</td>
<td>едак, Artemisa</td>
<td>2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Náufragos</td>
<td>едак, Ruedamares</td>
<td>2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alamito en la creciente</td>
<td>едак, Edelvés</td>
<td>2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duraznos</td>
<td>prowadził, Quipu</td>
<td>2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La secreta sílaba del beso</td>
<td>едак, Macmillan</td>
<td>2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pétalo de nube</td>
<td>едак, Mammilans</td>
<td>2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emilia y la zapallita perdida</td>
<td>едак, Artemisa</td>
<td>2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El rey y la rebelión de las margaritas</td>
<td>едак, Artemisa</td>
<td>2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La princesa de papeles</td>
<td>едак, Artemisa</td>
<td>2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La reina de las abejas</td>
<td>едак, Artemisa</td>
<td>2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encantado, dijo el sapo</td>
<td>Comunicarte, Comunicarte</td>
<td>2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Una gota de azul</td>
<td>едак, Edelvés</td>
<td>2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El trasluz</td>
<td>⚞!, SM</td>
<td>2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>De coronas y galeras</td>
<td>.Lerp, Ruedamares</td>
<td>2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caminaditos</td>
<td>Lo, Los cuatro azules, 2013</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Los días de Guille</td>
<td>anda, Tinta Fresca Ediciones, 2012</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¿Dónde está? (Where is He?)</td>
<td>едак, Macmillan</td>
<td>2012</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Libros para adultos**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Libro</th>
<th>Editorial</th>
<th>Año</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pétalo de nube</td>
<td>едак, Mammilans</td>
<td>2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emilia y la zapallita perdida</td>
<td>едак, Artemsa</td>
<td>2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El rey y la rebelión de las margaritas</td>
<td>едак, Artemsa</td>
<td>2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La princesa de papeles</td>
<td>едак, Artemsa</td>
<td>2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La reina de las abejas</td>
<td>едак, Artemsa</td>
<td>2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encantado, dijo el sapo</td>
<td>Comunicarte, Comunicarte</td>
<td>2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Una gota de azul</td>
<td>.tcp, SM</td>
<td>2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El trasluz</td>
<td>���!, SM</td>
<td>2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>De coronas y galeras</td>
<td>Lr, Ruedamares</td>
<td>2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caminaditos</td>
<td>Lo, Los cuatro azules, 2013</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Los días de Guille</td>
<td>anda, Tinta Fresca Ediciones, 2012</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¿Dónde está? (Where is He?)</td>
<td>едак, Macmillan</td>
<td>2012</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
‘María Cristina Ramos’ production is characterised principally by recreating the voices and thoughts of childhood. Through a careful selection of poetic words, she binds together with subtle threads the everyday speech of children and her deep poetic voice, a voice that flies off to create fantastic settings in regions that are seldom visited by people from the big cities. Nature is part of her stories, bringing credibility through a discourse that feeds from fresh air, little puddles, and leafy trees. Children wander freely, barefoot or wearing trainers, coming in and out of their homes, and their lives fold and unfold nourished by Neuquén’s beautiful landscape. Their talks, dreams, falls, and conflicts raise from the generosity of a nature that offers adventures and builds the realistic background from which the fantastic emerges in triumph.’

Lidia Blanco
Specialist in Literature for Children and Young Adults
‘Reading is woven with the inner world of the reader, the edges of existing concepts, the underlying sentiments that haven’t yet been named, the excitement of our own questions. Reading walks barefoot into our inner yards, taming threatening shadows, setting up a castle with a bridge that leads to certainty, moving the moat aside to cultivate a new field of doubts; reading adds ladders for a new search. The reader is wonderfully bound to hundreds of presences that sustain culture, though completely alone, accompanied by a voice that wanders with someone else’s solitude.’

María Cristina Ramos

Aproximación a la narrativa y a la poesía para niños. Los pasos descalzos
(An Approach to Narrative and Poetry for Children. The Barefoot Steps)
Azul la cordillera (Blue, the mountain chain)

Review of Azul la cordillera (Blue, the mountain chain), written by Marcela Carrozzi, and published by Imaginaria magazine (www.imaginaria.com.ar) on March 1, 2006.

Azul la cordillera (Blue, the mountain chain) tells us a story about a place, and about a way of looking at that place.

The narrative is composed by the different voices of the protagonists: a boy who crosses the mountains to his stay-in school; the Mapuche woman who, as a member of the indigenous people of the region, does not forget she is the owner of that land; the teachers, the cleaning lady, an illiterate woman. We get to know them through their thoughts, their memories, their words acting as a ‘bridge’—as in the title of the last pages also illuminate fragments of the Mapuche culture, such as the legend of Nahuel, a mythical figure—half human, half tiger—who helped José’s grandfather, guiding him to safety when the old man got lost in the mountains in the middle of a storm.

Structurally, María Cristina Ramos’ novel contains 14 stand-alone short stories, told by different characters who are part of a small community in a town in the middle of the Andean Mountain Range. It is precisely that structure that makes it so interesting, since there are virtually no unifying elements of the type that would be traditionally expected in a novel, such as a single plot line, or an introduction, middle and end, which provide a progressive, cohesive, linear direction to the narrative, in particular with an omniscient narrator.

On the contrary, in Azul la cordillera (Blue, the mountain chain) the narrative fragments are scattered (in fact, they could be read in a different order), not tied to a strict, progressive and linear order, and above all, they do not follow the pattern of a single phonological enunciation, but their materiality emerges from a choral discourse format, where the characters contribute their stories, their thoughts, their musings and their memories. It is a shared fabric that may seem to mimic the technique of the loom, where multiple colours are woven in horizontally across the tapestry’s vertical lines.

Apart from this special labour of love with words, reproducing cadences and turns of phrase that come from the real people’s use of language, it seems that the cohesive element that binds the novel together is the convergence of these individual discourses into one single shape that represents the whole constellation of an integrated community and their ties of solidarity, as in a mosaic or kaleidoscope. The narrative unit recovered at the end when you finish reading the book is the one underscoring the community bond present in the aboriginal culture. I believe that the purpose of this novel is to connect us with a significant part of our identity, by means of words acting as a ‘bridge’—as in the title of the last chapter—to cross over leaving discrimination and intolerance behind, a utopia of integration through the communion of literature.

Gustavo Lespada[1]

Nota al pie:
[1] Gustavo Lespada has a PhD in Literature from the University of Buenos Aires. He won the Juan Rufino Award in 2003, for his literary essay on Radio Francia Internacional – UNESCO Archives Collection. He is a researcher and lecturer, teaching Latin American Literature at the School of Literature and Philosophy at the University of Buenos Aires.
The author offers a delightful and fun ride in a book about fish and ants, about flying and about dancing. This book is a collection of twelve fresh and beautiful poems for small children that have the power of instantly getting readers in a good mood.

Review of *Maíces de silencio* (Kernels of Silence), written by Germán Machado, and published in a blog under the name Garabatos y Ringorrangos (mailto:https://machadolens.wordpress.com/) on September 26, 2018.

*Maíces de silencio* (Kernels of Silence): A jolly bellyful of poems to be eaten one by one

Let’s imagine a rural scene for a moment: we are out in the sun, on a nurturing, dusty stretch of land, a hen walks by, easy like a Sunday morning, pecking corn kernels here and there. She walks peacefully, no haste. Her head goes up and down as she pecks, every time she conquers a golden kernel, and another one, and another one. She eats them one by one. And she gets plump and happy.

This scene could be an apt metaphor to illustrate what reading this poetry book titled *Maíces de silencio* (Kernels of Silence) means, because readers go calmly poem by poem, page after page through these charming minimalistic stanzas that break the still instant to fly away into the haunting eternity of silence.

Readers will read these poems little by little, maybe out loud, and then there will be silence. Readers will dive into the pages, their heads going up and down, as if pecking on the verses, only to stop and digest each luminous kernel, conquered through reading. Poetry also suggests this way of reading.

Many a time I have complained of authors who abuse popular poetry forms when it comes to writing for children. The rigid forms that demand minor verses and obvious rhymes seem to be the gold standard in children’s poetry. I have complained because, more often than not, the form becomes a void that underscores the childish nature of nursery rhymes, in detriment of the literary content of the poem. And so, I actually complain about the lack of poetry.

Perhaps my complaint has been construed as a complete rejection for this kind of traditional poetry. Alas, no. I find it wonderful when I read a poet like María Cristina Ramos, who builds her poems with impeccable formal precision, and at the same time is capable of focusing on the poem’s core, making it glow, like a golden corn kernel for the hen who is pecking here and there and is seeking under the sun to see.

That is what I found in this book containing 12 poems for first time readers. Each brief poem takes up four pages in the book, as follows:

- A double page printed on a solid colour with the title of the poem and a detailed illustration;
- Another double page with the text of the poem and a general illustration.

---

Review of *Maíces de silencio* (Kernels of Silence), written by Germán Machado, and published in a blog under the name Garabatos y Ringorrangos (mailto:https://machadolens.wordpress.com/) on September 26, 2018.

*Maíces de silencio* (Kernels of Silence): A jolly bellyful of poems to be eaten one by one

Let’s imagine a rural scene for a moment: we are out in the sun, on a nurturing, dusty stretch of land, a hen walks by, easy like a Sunday morning, pecking corn kernels here and there. She walks peacefully, no haste. Her head goes up and down as she pecks, every time she conquers a golden kernel, and another one, and another one. She eats them one by one. And she gets plump and happy.

This scene could be an apt metaphor to illustrate what reading this poetry book titled *Maíces de silencio* (Kernels of Silence) means, because readers go calmly poem by poem, page after page through these charming minimalistic stanzas that break the still instant to fly away into the haunting eternity of silence.

Readers will read these poems little by little, maybe out loud, and then there will be silence. Readers will dive into the pages, their heads going up and down, as if pecking on the verses, only to stop and digest each luminous kernel, conquered through reading. Poetry also suggests this way of reading.

Many a time I have complained of authors who abuse popular poetry forms when it comes to writing for children. The rigid forms that demand minor verses and obvious rhymes seem to be the gold standard in children’s poetry. I have complained because, more often than not, the form becomes a void that underscores the childish nature of nursery rhymes, in detriment of the literary content of the poem. And so, I actually complain about the lack of poetry.

Perhaps my complaint has been construed as a complete rejection for this kind of traditional poetry. Alas, no. I find it wonderful when I read a poet like María Cristina Ramos, who builds her poems with impeccable formal precision, and at the same time is capable of focusing on the poem’s core, making it glow, like a golden corn kernel for the hen who is pecking here and there and is seeking under the sun to see.

That is what I found in this book containing 12 poems for first time readers. Each brief poem takes up four pages in the book, as follows:

- A double page printed on a solid colour with the title of the poem and a detailed illustration;
- Another double page with the text of the poem and a general illustration.
The illustrations by Sandra de la Prada are hand-painted in lively colours, in acrylic and wax, practically without contour lines, and they convey an air of freedom that plays, in turn, upon the interpretation of the poems, as if the illustrations contained a narrative element to them. They go from detailed illustrations in the first double page to general illustrations in the double page where you read the poem. In each case, this pause between coloured pages offers a respite, a moment to linger on reading, reinforcing the idea of entering each poem as if pecking through the book, picking poems and silences here and there, like round and nurturing corn kernels. The book has just been published by Editorial SM, a publishing house from Spain (September 2018), recovering a previous Ruedamares edition that the author launched in Argentina, in 2003.

Review of Maíces de silencio (Kernels of Silence), written by Sandra Comino, and published by Revista Planetario - La guía de los chicos magazine.

Maíces de silencio (Kernels of Silence) is a book for children who are learning how to read. Author María Cristina Ramos lives in Neuquén (Patagonia, Argentina) and is well known for her poetry books—Un sol para tu sombrero (A Sun for your Hat) and Un bosque en cada esquina (Woods in Every Corner), published by Sudamérica—as well as her narrative books—Cuentos de la buena suerte (Good Luck Stories/Tales of Good Luck), published by Alfagnaara, De barrio somos (Our neighbourhood), published by Norma, and Azul la Cordillera (Blue, the mountain chain), published by Sudamericana, among others. The book is illustrated by Carlos Juárez, another Patagonia inhabitant who is the perfect companion to María Cristina’s poems. The illustrations are collage work in colour paper, newspaper, candy wrappers and threads, a true craft equivalent to the author’s artistry with words:

The river flows by, / and a bridge crosses over, / and on top of the bridge / someone’s very thirsty. They sat / in the shade, / they sipped iced tea / and one big drop / of cold black coffee. / The little spider climbs down / her delicate thread, / because under the bridge / she knows / the river flows by / and the bridge crosses over, / and on top of the bridge / someone’s very thirsty.

To enjoy with the whole family.

This book is a poetic quest that delves into life’s mysteries without losing the harmonious and playful sonority of children’s poetry. Nature appears sometimes as a conciliatory element and sometimes as a hazard. In many of these texts poetic questions are involved that can be food for thought and a trigger to readers’ sensitivity. This book received a Special Mention in the Poetry Category in the Alija Awards 2010.


I would normally start my review of this book, which I cannot put down, by telling you that it is a poetry book for children. However, when I first discovered María Cristina Ramos Guzmán (and I say ‘first discovered’ because it is a well-known fact that writers are discovered and rediscovered several times; the more times, the better), I reaffirmed a few considerations. First of all, children’s literature is a genre on its own right. Stating otherwise would be as foolish as considering that detective stories are stories for detectives. Children’s literature as a genre can be enjoyed by anyone, including children, of course.

Secondly, the book is worth its weight in lines. Poetry is poetry, and children have no issue with it. It is often adults who find issue with it, and we should be thankful that publishing house Anaya has refused to join the ranks of the latter. Also, children are not only thrilled about anything that sounds like a poem, they really get it. And this book sounds and smells like poetry. It smells like rain and sun, it sounds like sand and sea, it contains the tension of opposites that generates a creative force; it is a force that emerges from the chaos of a poetic universe where the sun and the rain jump from verse to verse, where words glistening with renewed beauty can be discovered. María Cristina Ramos is not limited by form; she uses form in a way that serves sound and music, and suddenly you understand why in some shopping malls books are placed next to the CDs. Very good debut of Paula Alenda, as an illustrator. Her work suggests, since her drawings emerge from the page as timid shapes with shy contours, There are no sharp lines. Paula Alenda politely asks for permission to come in, and hers is an ideal complement to this delicate work that can be enjoyed by children and detectives alike.
The narrative is told through the voice of a little girl, Lucía, the protagonist, who tells us the story of a period in her life when she and her family, and the community where they live, experience different situations connected to loss, deprivation, sadness, joy, fears, dreams, projects, wishes and unfair circumstances such as unemployment and a black out that leaves them all in the dark. This little girl, who lives with her mother and her siblings in a very humble house by the river, speaks tenderly about what she learns about life through words, and how she builds her own story to understand her surroundings and the events that take place in her circle.

Lidia Blanco says that ‘María Cristina Ramos’ work has an essential trait: the recreation of children’s voices and thoughts.’ Lucía, the protagonist, tells us the story of a period in her life when she and her family, and the community where they live, experience different situations connected to loss, deprivation, sadness, joy, fears, dreams, projects, wishes and unfair circumstances such as unemployment and a black out that leaves them all in the dark. This little girl, who lives with her mother and her siblings in a very humble house by the river, speaks tenderly about what she learns about life through words, and how she builds her own story to understand her surroundings and the events that take place in her circle. Carlos Silveira points out that ‘we could say that María Cristina Ramos draws a picture with words.’ This particular feature of her work is very present in this book. Lucía talks and paints the nature of her surroundings with words, she also uses them to draw a picture of her neighbourhood and the world of her feelings and affections.

‘Mamma always told me that my hair would grow if I combed it carefully every morning, and if I washed it with rainwater. And as the river came down from the mountain range, I thought that water was even better, because snow water comes from a sky that is even higher than the sky where rain comes from.’ Quoting Lidia Blanco again, she says that the ‘Through a careful selection of poetic words, [the author] binds together with subtle threads the everyday speech of children and her deep poetic voice, a voice that flies off to create fantastic settings in regions that are seldom visited by people from the big cities.’ ‘We had a big backyard that extended to the riverbank. In our backyard, there was a willow tree that was like a green sky to eat in its shadow. A little further we had sand, to bury and unbury ourselves, and beyond, the stones—those fantastic stones to join rolling into the water.’ On the other hand, Pilar Muñoz Lazcano, commenting on this book and Azul la cordillera, says that ‘both books convey a poetic state right from their titles, a way of “being in poetry”, as defined by Laura Devetach.’

‘Silence was an invisible bell you could use to imagine everything.’ María Cristina Ramos, in Mientras duermen las piedras (While the stones sleep), is a novel written by María Cristina Ramos, and published by Edelvives in 2011, as part of their Alandar collection. The novel deals with the issue of poverty and everything that it entails, as well as coping strategies to overcome tough situations. Her view on the topic contains a social perspective, but the author mainly approaches the issue from an aesthetic perspective, where the literary devices used force the reader to surrender to the text, to reading, to the words’ particular music. We are faced with a very well-crafted language, enriched with a careful appeal to beauty. The narrative is told through the voice of a little called Lucía, and through her, we hear other voices—her siblings’, her mother’s, her grandma’s, her teacher’s.

In a lecture given by Devetach together with Lidia Blanco in 2004, the author refers to this state of ‘being in poetry’. She elaborates:

“I am referring to the poetic space as that place or time when a capacity to see the obvious and put it in harmonious or effective words awakens in you. And even without words, that poetic space gives us the ability to weave ties and to recover a poetical dialogue, other than the rigid official dialogue that sometimes our daily life imposes on us.’

Later, she cites Johannes Baujer who expressed it this way: ‘(It’s all about) learning not to remain untouched by what appears to be obvious. We need to become simple and naïve. Explicitly and consciously ask about what we thought we knew, and exchange the big bills of commonplace understanding for these humble coins. It is only then that we can get to the essence of things.’

That is how Lucía understands her outer and inner worlds, and that of her siblings, her mother and her grandmother, all of whom are in a permanent state of poetry and peek into life from their own poetic way of looking and feeling.

“We started to feel that the days were getting shorter and shorter, and the nights were really long, because we did not feel like talking in the dark too much. The silence was so big that sometimes it buzzed in our ears, and we would hear a noise inside ourselves, like a river, as if we ran out of words, our blood would get all chatty.’

Lidia Blanco also refers to the way in which María Cristina Ramos proposes an exit door into a different world:

The stories take place within an ethical framework that is supported by affection and solidarity, as the exit door to a different world where authentic communication and the pursuit of happiness are possible, without contraptions or sophistication (…). In these texts, unhappiness is the product of intolerance and it is resolved in endings that entail an effort on the part of the characters to change the surrounding environment or change themselves, in order to come up with a resolution to the conflict. ‘The right to a better world appears as something natural.’

This definition provided by Lidia Blanco becomes apparent throughout the novel. One of the key characters in that sense is the grandmother. Lucía tells us that:

“Grandma would come to visit us every day, and she always asked if we had eaten. We always said “yes”. Grandma was like 50 years...
old but every other day she would get her canoe
to go fishing, and when she came back, she
always left something for us. She had many
grandchildren, but they were all make believe
grandchildren, because all of her children had
moved away and did not come to visit.’

In the novel, the way out for each of the problems
they have to face, as well as to painful situations and
even to the small but essential joyful events, is not
individual but communal. The hopes and dreams
about better times do not translate as inaction; on the
contrary, they are a call to action: there are petitions,
demonstrations, cooperation between neighbours, a
 communal orchard, and above all, words with their
power to transform.

‘Her laughter was made up by the joy we all
felt. That joy was going to be the engine to
continue fighting against the dryness of the
land.’

We find words used to claim, to shelter, to caress, to
engage in dialogue. And we also find that the ties, the
love and affection and the cooperation are supported
and sustained by language.

‘In my dream, there was a rabbit. He was as
small as a coin, and he was playing in our
orchard. He hopped among the leaves and he
dug little holes. And then, the carrots appeared
and said hello to him. The carrots were together
as a bunch, so that he could see that they were
people and should not eat them.’

Lucía wonders why there are no footprints in the
quiet grey stones in the riverbank. It is words that
leave an indelible print, a trail that contains the voices
of those who came before, the voices that contribute
in building our identity.

María Cristina Ramos draws and paints with the
colours of nature and the colours of feelings, with
their smells and music notes. She weaves and
embroiders the fabric of language, offered as a space
for freedom.

In a workshop led by Mirta Colángelo in Bahía
Blanca, she told us how she worked on poetry with
children:

‘We all go outside to watch the trees, to see
what they are made of. They are made of
leaves, so we picked them up. Then we picked
up feathers. The children played with the fallen
leaves (...), in sum, they discovered lurking
beauty.’

In an interview that Silvina Juri conducted for Edeljí,
the author said that ‘Poetry rescues the value of
silence. You could say that it is that mysterious
something that is between words and silence. It is
that attempt to slow down time by delaying the next
word for a few seconds so as to listen to the next
poetic bit, which also harbours silence. I think that
this is where the value of a whisper resides.’

As I was reading the novel, I felt that Lucía’s whispers
came to me, as the rhythm of the narrative gently
made its way, without haste, delayed in precious
instants between words and silences, surrounded
lurking beauty [1].

Blanco, Lidia. ‘María Cristina Ramos, una escritura a
favor de la infancia’. La Mancha. Papeles de literatura
 ar/03/8/mancha.htm. November 2000
Blanco, Lidia and Devetach, Laura. ‘Portalecimiento de la
tarea educativa en instituciones maternales. Cantos y
cuentos en el Jardín Maternal’. Lecture read at Biblioteca
del Docente (Argentine teacher’s library). CEPA (Teacher
Juri, Silvina. ‘Entrevista a Mirta Colángelo’. EDELIJ.
‘Mirta Colángelo suma voz tejida’. https://www.youtube.
com/watch?v=aYZoGXAxU00. October 2011
Muñoz Lascano, Pilar. ‘Revalorización del lenguaje poético
en la narrativa argentina para niños y jóvenes – Parte III’.
Cubos de mi torre, 4 December 2011.
Silveyra, Carlos. ‘María Cristina Ramos’. Entry in the
Gran Diccionario de Autores Latinoamericanos de
Literatura Infantil y Juvenil, SM.

All the lyrics of the band Unicanuez are poems by María Cristina Ramos. They include projections of cut-out paper in their presentations:
https://unicanuez.bandcamp.com/
https://vimeo.com/user19251890

María Cristina Ramos reading her texts:
Barcos en la lluvia (Boats in the Rain)
“Dentro de una palabra” (Inside a Word)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x2pbeYsalbQ

“Canción para no olvidar” (A Song to Remember)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XE-6Slrqt0Y

“Solar del amor escondido” (A Yard of Hidden Love)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hzQcLWJJ0wA

“Torcaza” (Ring Dove)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Jvb951Giz4

An interview with the author after receiving the 12th Ibero-American
SM Award for Literature for Children and Young Adults:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7tneUzpcTI

LINKS
‘The thread came in and out
The thread would come and go;
The needle, a white bird;
Its tail of silence, bowed.

Her Granny doesn’t know
Her sewing thread’s the size
The girl just needs to find
Her little dreaming eyes.

Before the thread runs out
The air has stopped to meet
The butterflies that perch
When the girl is asleep.

Just like a sloping petal
Just like a bending flower
Just like a kiss that nests
Into the loving light’s hour.

It may have been of white thread
The little dream she dreamt
With eyes coming and going
With secrets the two shared.

Maria Cristina Ramos
‘De hilo blanco’ (fragment), in La escalera.
Translated by Daniela Bentancur