

María José Ferrada

Chilean Writer Candidate
for Hans Christian Andersen Award 2026





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1. Biographical Information



“I would like to tell children that no matter the circumstances they find themselves in, when night falls, the stars will be there, shining. And when day breaks, the clouds will draw pictures in the sky. All children, especially those living in hardship, should claim that beauty, which belongs to us simply by inhabiting this world,” she shares in one of her lectures.”

María José Ferrada



María José Ferrada Lefenda (Temuco, Chile, 1977) is a writer and journalist. She began her journey in writing by creating stories for her younger brother, and today she is a recognized voice in children's and young adult literature. Her works have been translated into more than twenty languages and have received prestigious international awards, such as the Ibero-American SM Award for Children's and Young Adult Literature (2021) and the Ibero-American Cervantes Chico Award (2022). In 2022, she was appointed a corresponding member of the Chilean Academy of Language, in recognition of her contribution to children's literature. Her work has been celebrated by critics for its literary quality, its ability to work across different genres, and its capacity to connect with readers of all ages.

Her interest in Japanese culture has deeply influenced her writing, imbuing it with a minimalist style and lyrical sensibility. Throughout her life, she has lived in Chile, Panama, Spain, and Germany—experiences that have enriched the cultural depth of her work. Her texts cover a wide range of topics, celebrating the beauty of everyday life, emphasizing connections with natural landscapes, and exploring the impact of dictatorships and migration on childhood experiences.

Firmly believing that literature should be accessible to all children, she collaborates on literacy campaigns and inclusive projects, such as books with pictograms for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and Braille books. These initiatives have been recognized internationally, with distinctions such as the Bologna Ragazzi Award, New Horizons (2023), granted to *El bolso*. María José currently lives in southern Chile, where she conducts creative writing workshops in rural schools. These workshops aim to awaken the good, the just, and the beautiful within each child, promoting both empathy and wonder through literature.



2. María José Ferrada's Contribution to Children's and Young Adult Literature



Madrid, December 23, 2024

Dear members of the Hans Christian Andersen Award Jury,

I am writing to you as a poet, Professor of Spanish Literature at the University of Granada (Spain), and Director of the Instituto Cervantes since 2018, to strongly recommend Chilean writer María José Ferrada as a candidate for the Hans Christian Andersen Award.

María José Ferrada has developed an important body of work that sheds light on the complex realities of childhood, using her poetic voice to give a voice to those who have none. Books of hers such as *Niños*, dedicated to the memory of the 34 children executed and/or imprisoned and disappeared during the Chilean dictatorship, or *Mexique, el nombre del barco*, an album that tells the story of the Mexican exile of 456 children of Spanish republicans, show, as she has explained in every international forum she has participated in, that it is possible to create literature that involves children in the recovery of memory and reflection on the need for a more inclusive and just society.

Thus, in my opinion, María José Ferrada stands out as an exceptionally unique voice in Spanish-language literature, whose work, internationally recognized with awards such as the Ibero-American Cervantes Chico Prize and the Ibero-American SM Prize for Children's and Young Adult Literature, among others, deserves distinctions, such as those granted by your institution, to allow her to continue working in favor of the love of literature and in the development of the political and social awareness of future generations.

For all these reasons, I kindly ask you to consider the candidacy of the Chilean writer for the Hans Christian Andersen Award.

Sincerely,

Luis García Montero
Director Instituto Cervantes

Santiago de Chile, September 30, 2024

Hans Christian Andersen Award
International Board on Books for Young People
Present

Dear members of the Hans Christian Andersen Award Committee:

Along with expressing our gratitude for the important work you do in recognizing creators of children's and young adult literature, I am writing today on behalf of Fundación Palabra, with the purpose of supporting the nomination of María José Ferrada for the Hans Christian Andersen Award in the author category.

Fundación Palabra is an institution that seeks to promote the enjoyment and connection of children, young people, and adolescents with reading, culture, and Latin American heritage in order to contribute to the formation of citizens committed to their own development and that of their community. To achieve this goal, it created the Latin American Interactive Children's and Young Adult Library, BILIJ, which has allowed us to confirm through various testimonies and reading experiences the profound literary value of María José Ferrada's work.

María José Ferrada has a vast and remarkable trajectory as a writer of children's and young adult literature. Over the past 15 years, she has continuously and robustly contributed to helping children, young people, adults, and people from various countries expand their view of the world and cultivate their sense of wonder. Her writing invites the reader to observe reality and its details, to appreciate the richness of nature and its processes, and to understand the complexity of human experiences, always from a broad, deep perspective with simple and precise language. The combination of these three elements allows her work to transcend ages and geographic territories, reaching the hearts of people of all ages and nationalities, positioning her as an author of undeniable value.

In addition to her literary and aesthetic contribution, María José Ferrada is a writer who connects with her readers by participating in workshops, literary meetings, fairs, and festivals. This aspect is essential as it helps to promote reading, democratize access to meaningful cultural experiences, and strengthen the book and reading ecosystem. Moreover, her excellent willingness to engage with children shows her genuine interest in connecting with the world of childhood.

In summary, María José Ferrada is deserving the prestigious Hans Christian Andersen Award. Her literary work is a profound invitation to connect with the environment through wonder, empathy, and affection, three essential components for the holistic development of children, young people, and adults.
Yours sincerely,

Constanza Mekis
Presidenta Fundación Palabra

São Paulo, September 30, 2024

Hans Christian Andersen Award
International Board on Books for Young People

It is with great enthusiasm that, on behalf of Instituto Emília, we support the nomination of María José Ferrada for the Hans Christian Andersen Award.

Throughout her career as a writer and advocate for reading, María José Ferrada's work is based upon her conviction that literature is a space where children and young people can reflect on their past and their future. This commitment and responsibility towards younger generations of readers are materialized in books such as *Crianças, Mexique o nome do navio*, and *Kramp*, which have received the highest recognitions in Brazil for children's and young adult literature.

These books demonstrate the author's ability to make poetic language a tool for thought and memory: a refuge available to childhood.

This ability to illuminate pain with tenderness, in works focused on dictatorships and forced migrations, finds a counterpart in books where poetry is used to celebrate the beauty of the human and natural landscape. Reading her work is an invitation to understand, at any age, that human life is an experience of profound complexity and possible beauty. Without losing a genuine connection with readers, María José Ferrada's work stands out not only in Latin America but also internationally.

This worldwide recognition is confirmed by the numerous literary awards she has received. Among them, in Brazil, the UNESCO Chair in Reading Children's Literature Award, Brazil, 2021 (*Meu bairro*, Pallas Editora, 2020); the UNESCO Chair in Reading Children's and Young Adult Literature Excellence Award, Brazil, 2021 (*Mexique o nome do navio*, Pallas Editora, 2020); the 2024 IBBY Honour List, translation category (*Kramp*, Editora Moinhos, 2020); and the Destaques Emília 2020 and 2021.

For all these reasons, we enthusiastically reaffirm our support for María José Ferrada's candidacy and everything her work represents for children's and young adult literature in Latin America.

Best regards,

Maria Dolores Vianna Prades

Directora del Instituto Emília

Zaragoza, January 2, 2025

Dear members of the Hans Christian Andersen Award Jury,

I am writing to you in my capacity as an Accredited Professor of Children's Literature at the University of Zaragoza (Spain) and as the Director of the Master's program in Children's and Young Adult Reading, Books, and Readers at the same university (www.literaturainfantil.es), as well as the Director of the Expert Certificate in Children's and Young Adult Literature of Latin America and the Caribbean (www.literaturainfantil.es/titulo-experto/), to strongly recommend our distinguished collaborator, Chilean writer María José Ferrada, as a candidate for the Hans Christian Andersen Award.

In addition to the numerous and significant accolades she has received, such as the Ibero-American Cervantes Chico Prize and the Ibero-American SM Prize for Children's and Young Adult Literature, María José Ferrada's poetic voice has introduced a very particular, new, and honest voice to the creative universe of children's and young adult literature, as well as to literature without adjectives. Her writing defines a new way of approaching literature for childhood, youth, and adulthood. Her prose and poems are built from silence and a serene way of observing—both what surrounds her and herself. For the author, poetry is a way of inhabiting the world, her way of living, and her political approach to reality. The poetics of the object, the detail, and the small, fascinate her as much as the internal rhythm of concepts in balance, with nature as the inevitable backdrop.

From her training as a journalist, reality becomes her source of inspiration, and only from this perspective can works like *Notas al margen* or those like *Niños* and *Mexique, el nombre del barco* be explained, which claim memory, justice, and pain for art as intensities that should not be forgotten in the voices of child protagonists. Thus, trusting the power of words, María José Ferrada sketches the present and future through the lens of the past, which is crucial to ensure, from childhood, the foundations of a more just, inclusive, and diverse society.

The author María José Ferrada, based on these reasons, deserves the utmost consideration, as evidenced by her unquestionable and recognized presence in international studies and research where her extensive work is largely recognized as a canonical reference. This is also attested by the presence of works such as *El idioma secreto*, *El lenguaje de las cosas*, *Un jardín*, and the aforementioned *Niños* and *Mexique, el nombre del barco*, in formative reading proposals at all educational levels, and particularly in the canon of mandatory reading for future teachers.

For all the reasons presented, and with the sincere and firm conviction that distinctions like the Hans Christian Andersen Award contribute to recognizing and legitimizing literary proposals that ensure the foundations of a new social pact for a more hospitable future, I kindly ask you to consider the Chilean writer's candidacy for the highest distinction in Children's and Young Adult Literature.

Thank you for your attention.

Best regards,

Rosa Tabernero Sala

Universidad de Zaragoza

Bogotá, September 3, 2024

Hans Christian Andersen Award
International Board on Book for Young People

Dear Members of the Hans Christian Andersen Award Committee:

It is an honor for me to support the nomination of María José Ferrada for the Hans Christian Andersen Award in the author category. María José Ferrada, one of the most significant voices in contemporary children's literature, has demonstrated an exceptional ability to capture the essence of childhood through poetic and profoundly emotive language.

María José Ferrada's work is characterized by the delicacy of her poetic prose, a quality that resonates with readers of all ages. Ferrada builds intimate worlds that allow readers to explore their own emotions and deepest thoughts. Her writing invites introspection while creating a space where imagination flourishes.

One of the most remarkable characteristics of Ferrada's work is her ability to use simple language with great expressive power. Her style is defined by a careful choice of words and lyrical precision, allowing her to convey complex emotions through simple yet powerful imagery. Her texts create atmospheres that envelop the reader, transporting them to places where the ordinary becomes extraordinary.

The poetic work of this author opens a door for young readers to contemplation and the appreciation of the beauty of language, while also fostering empathy and reflection— essential attributes in the development of young readers in an increasingly fast-paced and digitalized world.

María José Ferrada deserves to be recognized with the Hans Christian Andersen Award for her invaluable contribution to children's literature. Her ability to touch the souls of her readers through her poetic writing is a testament to her talent and commitment to creating literature that not only tells stories but also enriches the human experience.

Thank you for your attention and consideration of this nomination.

Sincerely,

Fanuel Hanán Díaz

Writer and Independent Scholar

Santiago de Chile, January 8, 2025

2026 Hans Christian Andersen Award Jury,
The International Board on Books for Young People
(IBBY)

From IBBY Chile, we are honored to present the nomination of the renowned national author María José Ferrada for the Hans Christian Andersen Award 2026. María José has dedicated her career to enriching children's and young adult literature, both in Chile and internationally.

Her poetic and narrative work stands out for its deep and tangible humanity and undeniable ability to subtly weave everyday life into her stories. Each of her creations reflects an exceptional talent for connecting with young audiences, inviting them to explore and appreciate the beauty of simplicity in their surroundings.

María José presents a worldview without idealizations, offering through her writing an honest and emotive portrayal of life's complexities. Her narratives have been recognized by readers in Chile and internationally for their authenticity and resonance.

With this nomination, we hope that the committee will recognize and value the universality of her work and the profound impact María José Ferrada has had on literature. This nomination is not only a tribute to her impressive career but also to her unique voice, committed to the realities of childhood.

Luz Yennifer Reyes Quintero

President, IBBY Chile



3. Appreciative Essay and Interview



Una conversación con María José Ferrada

A Conversation with María José Ferrada

by MARCELO E. GONZÁLEZ Z. and ANDREA CASALS HILL

Introducción

Esta conversación es parte del proyecto de investigación posdoctoral Fondecyt N° 1370134 donde Andrea Casals Hill es la investigadora responsable.

Hay algo secreto en la literatura de María José Ferrada, algo oculto, algo que parece esconderse tras las palabras, versos y oraciones que componen su obra literaria, la que abarca narración y poesía, para adultos y lectores infantiles y juveniles, sin distinción de su parte.

Y es que su obra, aparentemente sencilla, esconde ese asombro que regala la literatura a quienes la han descubierto o a quienes están por descubrirla. Regala ese amor por los detalles, por las pequeñas cosas, por lo cotidiano: revela así, el asombro de la vida diaria, la fascinación que provoca el día a día, y lo que se oculta y lo que se puede encontrar en los intersticios, los espacios vacíos que se generan entre las cosas que aparentemente no significan: es ahí, en donde Ferrada inserta la imaginación, como si aún fuera una niña,

Introduction

This conversation is part of the post-doctoral research project Fondecyt N° 1370134, in which Andrea Casals Hill is the leading researcher. The conversation was conducted in Spanish and all translations were made by Casals Hill.

There is something enigmatic in María José Ferrada's literature, a kind of mystery, something concealed behind the words, verses, and phrases that compose her literary work. Ferrada's work includes narratives and poetry for grown-ups and young readers, making no distinctions among them. The thing is, her apparently simple works contain that sense of wonder that literature offers to those who have discovered it. Ferrada's writing gifts love for details, for

small things, for the ordinary—revealing awe for everyday life and fascination triggered daily. It appeals to what hides and may be found in hinges and empty spaces that emerge between those apparently meaningless things. It is precisely in those spaces that Ferrada introduces



A CONVERSATION WITH MARÍA JOSÉ FERRADA

e ilumina toda la realidad, por medio de una obra profundamente lírica y lúdica.

Sobre estos aspectos y otros misterios, quisiémos preguntarle en la siguiente conversación.

En muchos de tus textos infantiles como *El lenguaje de las cosas* o *El idioma secreto*, demuestras un particular por el lenguaje y sus formas, lo que lo termina por convertir en el centro de las mismas ¿Cuál es la importancia de este elemento en la literatura infantil en general y en particular para ti?

Creo que el interés, el cariño y la duda frente al lenguaje es algo que compartimos varios de quienes elegimos el lenguaje como herramienta de expresión. En ese sentido siento interés y me hago preguntas contantes en torno a él, porque siempre quiero entender un poco más. La literatura infantil creo que es o puede ser un espacio privilegiado para hacernos esas preguntas y observar el lenguaje, porque muchos de nuestros lectores lo están recién conociendo y por lo mismo, no dan nada por sentado. Las onomatopeyas, por ejemplo, me interesan mucho porque de algún modo las siento como unas especies de palabras recién nacidas o un tránsito entre un sonido y una palabra. Partiendo solo desde este ejemplo, podemos ver cómo la literatura infantil nos da permiso para preguntarnos, entre muchas otras cosas, por los límites de lenguaje.

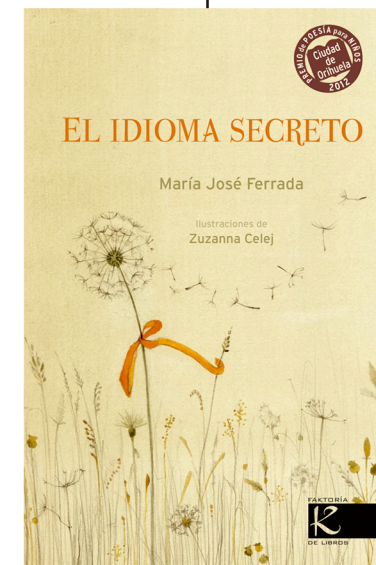
Tus textos poéticos como *Escondido*, *El baile diminuto* o las variadas antologías de haikus que has realizado, evidencian

her imagination, as if she were still a girl, illuminating all this reality by means of a profoundly playful and lyrical composition. In the following conversation, we asked María José Ferrada about these features and other mysteries.

In many of your books, such as *El lenguaje de las cosas* and *El idioma secreto*, you exhibit a particular interest in language and its form, which becomes central in your creations. How would you describe the importance of this element in children's literature in general and in your works?

I believe that those of us who have chosen language as our means of expression share interests, doubt, and love for language itself. In that sense, I feel interested and I am constantly asking questions about it; I always want to understand it a bit more. I believe children's literature is and can be a privileged space to make such questions and observe language because many of our readers are just beginning to get acquainted with language and, therefore, they do not take anything for granted. I am very interested in onomatopoeias, for example, because I somehow feel they are like newborn words, or a transition between sound and word. Starting from this example, we can see how children's literature allows us to make questions about the limits of language, among many other things.

Your poetic texts such as *Escondido*, *El baile diminuto*, and your haiku collections reveal your close relation to and the influence of Japanese literature in



la cercanía y la influencia que tiene la literatura japonesa en general en tu obra ¿Qué elementos de esta literatura tan peculiar rescatas y crees que son importantes a la hora de crear?

De los japoneses yo he aprendido algunas cosas que tienen que ver con la pregunta anterior, por ejemplo, la puesta en cuestión del lenguaje. Me interesan las observaciones que hace el budismo zen respecto al lenguaje como herramienta tramposa, es decir, como una posible barrera entre mi yo y la experiencia. Al nombrar una manzana, por ejemplo, cargo con las connotaciones que mi cultura da a la manzana y en ese sentido mi experiencia con la manzana deja de ser totalmente directa. Por otro lado ¿qué pasa con todo ese abanico de experiencias para las que no hay palabras? Entonces los monjes zen dicen: usemos el lenguaje, porque es nuestra herramienta, pero con conciencia de sus límites, integremos el silencio, juguemos con la lengua y es en ese lugar donde vuelvo a encontrarme con los niños, no solo como receptores sino como maestros.

En este sentido y continuando la pregunta anterior, hay en tu obra un intento de rescatar lo cotidiano y la simpleza de las pequeñas cosas. ¿Por qué crees que es importante centrar la atención en este aspecto de nuestra realidad?

Creo que puede ser importante, para mí lo ha sido, pero también creo que existen diferentes caminos para aprender las cosas. Yo, tal vez por una predisposición natural, he aprendido

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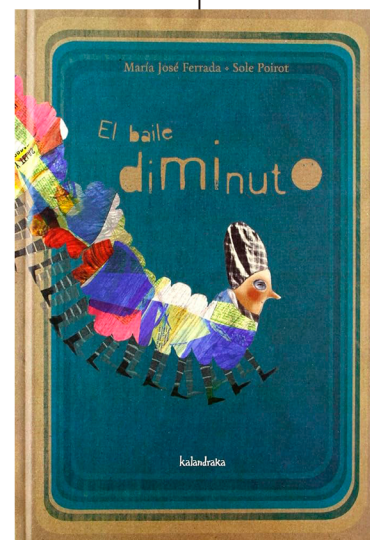
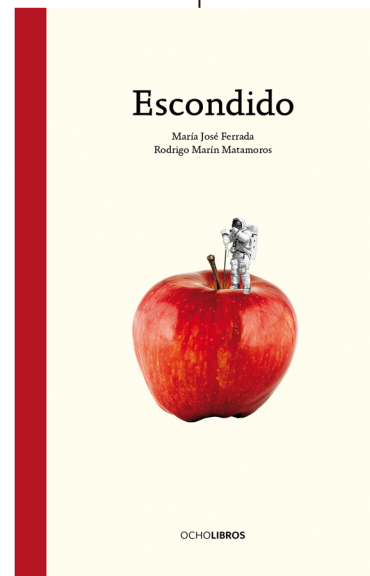
your works as a whole. Which elements of this specific literary tradition would you highlight and consider relevant in your creative work?

From the Japanese people I have learned some things that are related to the previous question—for example, to interrogate language. I am interested in observations made by Zen Buddhism regarding language as a tricky tool, that is, as a possible barrier between my inner self and experience. When naming an *apple*, for example, I must cope with the connotations my cultural background assigns to the word apple, and in that way, my personal experience with the apple isn't truly direct. On the other hand, what happens with the myriad of experiences for which there are no actual words? Zen monks say: language is our tool, let's use it, but let's be aware of its limits, let's integrate silence, let's play with language. It is at this point that I encounter children again, not only as receivers of language, but also as teachers.

Along these lines, in your works, you draw special attention to plain and ordinary things. Why do you regard it as important to call attention to such things?

I believe plain and ordinary things are important, they are important to me, but I also think there are many different ways to learn things. Probably because of a personal trait, I have learned by observing nature and tiny objects. There are pictures of me from the time when I was a girl where I am portrayed very concentrated

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observando la naturaleza, los pequeños objetos. Tengo fotografías de cuando era pequeña en las que aparezco muy concentrada en palitos, caracoles, hojas. Seguro que en ese entonces no tenía un por qué ni lo necesitaba, simplemente eran cosas que llamaban mi atención. Hay otros niños que ponen especial atención en los sonidos, o en espacios más grandes, como el cielo o las montañas y seguro que obtendrán de eso un aprendizaje valioso. En ese sentido creo en dejar que los propios intereses vayan tomando su curso y su propio ritmo. Más que creer que lo simple y lo pequeño es importante, creo que lo importante es buscar un camino propio de comprensión. Habrá quien lo encuentra en las palabras, quien lo encuentra en amasar en el pan y quien lo encuentra en las fórmulas matemáticas.

Hablemos de dos textos tremendos como son *Niños* y *Kramp*. Ambos, proponen una mirada acerca de la infancia que contrasta con el terrible contexto de la dictadura que sufrimos en nuestro país. ¿Qué te motivó a desarrollar esta temática?

Bueno, creo que como trabajo con niños soy más sensible a lo que les ocurre y la dictadura es algo que los chilenos no nos podemos saltar, porque nos marcó y la comprensión de quienes crecimos en los 80 estuvo fuertemente mediada por ella. Comencé a preguntarme qué había pasado conmigo, qué había pasado con otros niños y así fue como llegué a ambas historias. En el camino me di cuenta de que los niños suelen ser son víctimas bastante silenciosas de la violencia política, creo que porque por un lado los adultos tienden a encerrarse en su propio dolor y también porque no es fácil para una sociedad procesar el hecho de no

looking at sticks, snails, and leaves. Surely at that time I did not have a particular reason to do so, nor did I need it; these were simply things that called my attention. There are other kids that pay special attention to sound, or open spaces like the sky or mountains, and they surely get valuable learning from these. In that sense, I believe in allowing one's own interests and rhythm to lead. More than believing that the plain and simple are important, I believe that it is essential to find one's own path to understanding. Some people will find it in words, others will find it in making bread, and others may find it in mathematical formulas.

Let's talk about two tremendous books: *Niños* and *Kramp*. Both books suggest an idea of childhood that contrasts with the terrible context of the dictatorship that we suffered in Chile. What motivated you to venture in such topics?

Well, I think that since I work with children, I am very sensitive to what happens to them, and the dictatorship is something Chileans cannot overlook because it marked us,

and the understanding of those of us who grew up in the 1980s was strongly influenced by it. I began wondering what had happened to me, what had happened to other children, and that is how I came up with both stories. Along the way, I realized children tend to be quite invisible victims of political violence. On the one hand, this is because adults tend to close themselves up in their own pain, but also because it is difficult for a society to process the fact that it did not know, it does not know, how to protect its children. In Chile there is an institution called SENAME (the National Children's



haber sabido, no saber, proteger a sus niños. En Chile existe una institución llamada SENAME (Servicio Nacional de Menores), un organismo estatal que en teoría protege a los niños cuyos derechos han sido vulnerados y resulta que hace dos años supimos que en un lapso de diez años habían muerto 1300 niños que permanecían bajo su tutela, muchos de ellos por las condiciones precarias en las que vivían y otros directamente maltrato. Se supone que el estado debía cuidar, no matar a esos niños, y ¿qué ha pasado con eso? investigaciones en curso y nada más. Era como para que el país entero se paralizara y no, siguió funcionando y después de un par de semanas ya nadie quiso acordarse de la noticia. Eso habla muy mal de nosotros los adultos, porque el mensaje que le estamos dando a esos niños, a todos los niños, es que no nos importan.

Kramp, como sucede con la literatura japonesa, debe mucho a sus silencios y a lo que no se dice en la trama o lo que no se describe en su acción. ¿Crees que su buena recepción se deba a este aspecto o piensas que la obra ha adquirido relevancia debido a otra situación?

Creo que si algo ha jugado a favor de Kramp es su simpleza. Adultos, pero también niños de 12 años me han hecho llegar sus comentarios. Y a mí me interesa eso, creo que los niños (usé narrador niño en Kramp y también lo estoy usando en la novela que escribo ahora ahora) son capaces no solo de hablar, sino de interpelar al lector, develando los absurdos, la ternura y también las crueldades del mundo adulto. Confío en ese tipo de narradores capaces de observar y nombrar sin calculo, tanto como confío en la sabiduría de los niños.

La LIJ ha venido adquiriendo renom-

Service), which is meant to protect children whose rights have been transgressed. But it turns out that two years ago, we found out that in a time span of ten years, 1,300 children under SENAME's custody had died, many of them because of the precarious conditions in which they live or because of child abuse. The state was meant to look after them, not kill them! And what happens with that? Some prosecutor's queries, but nothing more. This piece of information should have had all the country on strike, but no, Chile went on functioning, making business as usual, and a few weeks later nobody ever remembered the news. This reveals a very ugly trait of us as adults, and it tells those children, and all children, that we adults don't really care about them.

Just as happens with Japanese literature, Kramp relies on silences and what is not said or described in the narrative. Would you say that the good reception the short novel has is due to this literary aspect, or do you think it is due to something else?

I believe that if something has favored *Kramp*, it is its simplicity. Adults, but also twelve-year-olds, have sent me their comments. And I am interested

in that (I created a child narrator for *Kramp* and I am also creating one now in the narrative I am currently working on); I believe children are capable of speech, and they are also able to question the reader, revealing absurdity, kindness, as well as the cruelties of the adult world. I trust such narrators, narrators that observe and can name without making calculations, just as much as I trust children's wisdom.

In the last decade, children's literature has slowly become recognized and valued among the academic community.

bre y ha comenzada a ser valorada en el mundo académico de forma seria en la última década. En ese contexto, tu obra, ha aportado a expandir los límites de esta y a consolidar su influencia en una nueva generación de lectores. ¿Qué pasa con esos nuevos lectores infantiles y con su relación con la literatura? ¿Cómo crees que les aporta la LIJ en general y tu obra en particular a su formación como lectores y como seres humanos?

La verdad es que me pregunto mucho eso ¿cómo llegan los libros que yo hago a los niños? ¿están siendo esos libros unos buenos amigos? Y es que he observado que los niños, sobre todos los más pequeños, se relacionan con los libros en momentos tan cruciales de su vida como es el momento en que se quedarán dormidos. Si ese niño tuvo un mal día, esa historia puede hacer que el día termine de mejor manera. Los adultos no nos entregamos tanto a una lectura. El niño sí, el niño lee y relee. Ese acto me conmueve y me hace tomarme mi tarea muy en serio. Pienso que ojalá pueda sacarles alguna sonrisa o ayudarles a comprender siquiera un poco este mundo confuso.

Finalmente, si puedes contarnos acerca de tus próximos proyectos ¿Qué nuevas obras de LIJ vienen en camino? ¿Algún texto que nos vuelva a acercar a la literatura oriental o una nueva obra en la línea de Kramp, quizás?

En LIJ se vienen segundas partes de dos libros. El primero es la continuación de Ippon no sento Manuel (La línea de Manuel), un libro con pictogramas, sobre autismo, desarrollado en conjunto con el ilustrador Patricio Mena para la editorial japonesa Kaiseisha. Esta vez el

In that sense, your publications have helped to expand the borders of this category and influence a new generation of readers. What happens with these new readers and their relationship to literature? How does children's literature in general, and your books in particular, contribute to their lives, their construction as readers and as human beings?

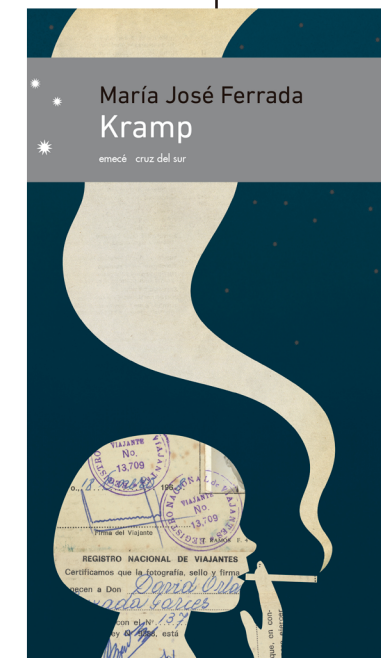
To be honest, I wonder too: How do the books I write reach the children? Are these books good company?

I have observed that children, particularly the youngest children, relate to books in very crucial moments of their lives, as happens at bedtime. If this child had a bad day, that story can make the day end in better terms. Adults don't give in to reading as much as children do. Kids do; they read and reread. That moves me and makes me take my job very seriously. I hope that I can make the readers smile or help them understand this confusing world a bit better.

Finally, we'd love to know about the projects you are currently working on. Would you share what's cooking? Anything that might take us back to

Japanese literature, or maybe back to Kramp?

I am working on two second parts of two books. The first one is related to *El día de Manuel*, a book with pictograms about autism, which is developed together with Patricio Mena for the Japanese publisher Kaiseisha. This time the tiny character goes on a picnic with his family, and he teaches us how he relates to the natural world. We picked the idea from some children at a nursery school in Fukushima who insisted on asking if Manuel was interested in insects



pequeño personaje va de pic nic con su familia, y nos enseña como se relaciona con los elementos de la naturaleza. La idea nos la dieron unos niños de un jardín infantil de Fukushima, que cuando contamos el primer cuento insistían en preguntar si a Manuel le gustaban o no los insectos. El segundo es un libro de pequeños poemas, también inspirados en la naturaleza, escrito en braille y que es la continuación de *Animal*, publicado por Alboroto en México.

También debería aparecer, en abril, mi segunda novela, que cuenta la historia de un niño de la periferia de una gran ciudad que observa por su ventana a un hombre –su tío– que ha decidido abandonar el mundo para irse a vivir al reverso de un cartel de Coca Cola...

Conclusión

Como se puede leer, resulta evidente que la obra de Ferrada es producto de una dedicación minuciosa y profundamente consciente de la representatividad que las palabras pueden lograr en torno a la realidad que nos rodea.

Hay en sus textos una mirada profunda y reflexiva de las situaciones que para cualquier otra persona podrían pasar desapercibidas, pero en sus manos, se transforman en episodios significativos que dan sentido por completo a vidas aparentemente pequeñas, menores, diminutas.

Su obra rescata, entonces, el valor de la expresión oral y escrita y la propia reflexión sobre la posibilidad de las palabras de dar cuenta de un mundo que es infinitamente más grande que lo que cabe en sus páginas. De esta manera, entonces, aparece como una literatura extremadamente consciente de su lugar en la vida de sus lectores, en su vida propia, y en el contexto histórico del país. Para no perdersela.

when we told them the story. The other project is a book of short poems, also inspired in nature; it is written in Braille, and it continues *Animal*, a book published by Alboroto in Mexico.

In April 2020, my second novel should appear. It tells the story of a boy who lives in the outskirts of a huge city; from his window he observes a man—his uncle—who has decided to leave this world in order to go and live in the back of a Coke billboard.

Conclusion

As you can see, it seems evident that Ferrada's work is a product of much dedication and that she is very much aware of the representative power words can achieve in the world that surrounds us. Her texts reveal depth and contemplation of situations that could be meaningless to other people; yet, in her hands, these are transformed into completely eloquent episodes, that give life to apparently insignificant, tiny, trivial lives.

Thus, her work rescues the value of oral and written expression, reflecting her personal insight on words' possibility to account for a world that is infinitely larger than what fits onto a page. Therefore, her literature crystallizes as writing that is tremendously aware of its place in the life of her readers and in the historical moment of our country. Don't miss her!

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Aesthetic and narrative voice in María José Ferrada's work. Bringing down barriers in children's literature.

Abstract: Narrative voices can be created in different ways and vary in their characteristics. The narrative voice of Chilean poet, María José Ferrada, differs substantially from other poetic voices. The objective in this essay is to analyze this voice and its particular aesthetic. In doing this, the analysis also shows how this voice helps bring down ideological barriers and adult-child power relationships in children's literature. A key factor for this result is that her poetic language is rooted in Japanese aesthetic. Therefore, Ferrada's voice would not be an artifice for delivering a certain message to children, but a particular understanding and perception of the world, which brings her closer to children's sensibility.

Keywords: María José Ferrada, narrative voice, Japanese aesthetic, children literature, ideology, poetic language.

Aesthetic and narrative voice in María José Ferrada’s work. Bringing down barriers in children’s literature.¹

Solange Suppa²

When you tell them [the older people] about a new friend, they never ask you about the essentials. They never say to you: ‘What is the timbre of his voice? What are the games he prefers? Do you collect butterflies?’

The Little Prince, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

To read María José Ferrada is to enter a world of sensations, of perceptions, where reason is set aside in order for sensitive experience to emerge. Along the way she manages to question, challenge, if not break, two paradigms deeply rooted in children’s and young adult literature: the transmission of the dominant ideology or for moralizing purposes, and the adult-child power relations that tend to be perpetuated through the supremacy of the adult vision of the world.

How does Ferrada manage to transport us to this world of the senses, so characteristic of his writing? Is there an aesthetic behind it that allows him to detach himself from these ties or theoretical views? What is it? What are its characteristics?

Through the analysis of two of her books: *Mexique, el nombre del barco* (2017a) and *Niños* (2013), we will try to find the origin of this singular voice. Both deal with current and conflictive topics from a social point of view: migrations in the first and dictatorships in the second. And, at the same time, both works focus on marginalized children. Children exiled during the war and children who disappeared during a military dictatorship. Both for the themes chosen in both books, as well as for the protagonists, ideology and the adult voice usually take on special relevance in this type of work.

The voice presented by Ferrada, on the other hand, absorbs the child’s gaze and enters it. It is a voice that manages to transgress that limit of the adult voice that borrows infantile characteristics, seeking the child’s identification, to transmit its vision of the world. It is a voice that makes possible the communication of a sensitive experience with no other object or utility than such experience.

The analysis, as the title of the paper establishes, is restricted and focused on the fictional voice, since in both works, through different paratexts, the author makes explicit her ideological position, but unveiling and separating herself from the voice she uses for fiction. She does it in an informative way, establishing a clear line between the two voices, the ideological and the fictional.³ For the same reason, the illustrations - made by people other than the author - are not analyzed either, since they escape the object of study.

At the same time, due to the length of the work, it was decided to limit the analysis to a single theme for each selected work. On the one hand, how poetic language resists ideology in *Mexique*, and how that same language resists power relations in *Niños*. However, it is noteworthy that both approaches could be valid for both books.

Introduction to the problems with children’s literature

Peter Hollindale (1988) argues that a good part of a book is written not by its author, but by the world in which the author lives. Although this is true, when conflictive social issues are dealt with in books for children or young people, such as wars, migrations, gender inequalities, etc., ideology tends to occupy a predominant position on certain occasions, thus transforming the work into the message it is intended to convey. Even more, transmitting preconceived ideas, prejudices or stereotypes that, because they are rooted in the society that produces them, are perpetuated eternally. Barthes could call them talking corpses, a language that refuses to die.

In the case of María José Ferrada, her voice does not seek to reverse the dominant discourses or to ascribe to a social consensus of what things should be, but rather these aspects are sublimated to language by elaborating a fictional voice that uses poetic language. It transcends ideological barriers, which we could think of as cultural myths, doing the exercise proposed by Roland Barthes in *Mythologies*. And why this approach? Precisely because for Barthes (2008) the language that resists, as much as it can, the myth, is the poetic language that “...strives to retransform the sign into meaning: its ideal - tendency - would be to arrive not at the meaning of words, but at the very meaning of things” (p. 227).

3. A distinction made by Roland Barthes (2008) for whom ideology has its methods and semiology has its own.

1. This work was done as a final project of the Master in Books and Literature for Children and Young People organized by the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona and the Banco del Libro de Venezuela.
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A myth, following Barthes' definition, is a speech, a communication system, a message open to appropriation by society that does not arise from the nature of things but from history itself. Because of the way of conceiving ideology that this theoretical perspective proposes, it allows us to do just what Peter Hollindale proposed in *Ideology and Children's Books* (1988):⁴ to go a step further in the focus of ideological analysis. That is, to go beyond explicit ideology and get to that which is inherent to language, the ideology that comes from the writer's subconscious and derives from the accumulation of common experiences. This would be the analysis of form for Barthes since under this approach: "The myth is not defined by the object of its message but by the form in which it is uttered" (p. 199). Barthes would then provide us with the tool that Hollindale believes so necessary for the analysis of ideology in children's literature.

Hollindale ratifies this broader definition of ideology by alluding to a sixteenth- century literary study of poetry, not confined to children's literature, cited below.

How does ideology affect literary texts? The impact of ideology on the writings of a particular society - or, for that matter, on the conventions and strategies by which we read those writings - is no different from the way it influences any other cultural practice [...] as we read it reminds us of what is right, common sense, or *natural* [...]. When a text is written, ideology works to make some things more natural; when a text is read, it works to cover up struggles and repressions, to force language to convey only those meanings encouraged by the dominant forces of our society (p. 14).⁵

This is the effect that myth has in Barthes' approach, it naturalizes situations making them transparent to the receiver, deforming the meaning itself: "...it impoverishes it, distances it, keeps it at his disposal" (p. 209).

Intersecting again both perspectives, it is interesting to note the very similar way they find to overcome this obstacle. Hollindale calls it "... those rare occasions when an author succeeds in recoloring the meaning of a word" (p. 15).⁶ This recoloring would be nothing less than the poetic language of which Barthes speaks. Those rare occasions in which the ideological barrier is crossed, or the myth is crossed, renaming things or giving new meaning to words.

Likewise, in children's literature, the voice of the child usually manifests itself as a catalyst of the adult vision, leading us to the problem of its use as an instrument of power, given the unequal position, both in society and in its cultural products, of children in relation to adults. Under this approach we find the theoretical approaches of, for example, Maria Nikolajeva (2010), where literature for children and young people can be seen from a tension of adult-child power, in which the adult vision of the

world would end up imposing itself (age norm). Moreover, the child would be objectified under this logic, since he/she loses all possibility of agency.

It is interesting to note at this point that Nikolajeva states in her analysis⁷ in *Power and Subjectivity in Picturebooks*, that the way in which adult norms could not only be questioned, but also disintegrated, is in those genres where a symbolic (not literal) interpretation is stimulated.

We see in María José Ferrada's work that her voice does not use resources such as irony or the ridiculing of the adult gaze, often used to reverse the age norm or the adult point of view. It would seem that her quest is not the subversion of power: adult-child, dominator-dominated, strong-weak, although perhaps it is the result. What she achieves is to capture moments or experiences, generating sensations, transmitting what is perceived through the senses. Perceptions that later will allow to reflect on reality from a more open and free perspective. That is her secret. She is not attentive to who will be her possible reader, but rather to share a sensibility, which leaves without effect the contest for the highest position in the hierarchy of power.

This sensibility understood as a way of seeing the world, in Ferrada's work, is strongly rooted in Japanese aesthetics. Literature thus ceases to be an instrument of power, it escapes this assumption, and becomes, like haiku⁸ in Japanese culture, an instrument for spiritual development. In *My Haiku Notebook*, Ferrada (2017b) puts it as follows:

The ancients said that in order to compose a good haiku, the poet had to forget himself and make himself available to what he observed. A good poet would let the cicada sing, but he would not say in his haiku whether that song was happy or sad, beautiful or unpleasant. He did not give his opinion, he simply let the cicada sing in his poem (p.44).

Its purpose has nothing to do with the receiver or the message itself, but with the poet's spontaneous perception. Its function, if it can be called that, is not practical or useful, but has more to do with providing some kind of pleasure, something that transcends its mere meaning.

As mentioned at the beginning of this paper, the approach to each work, *Mexique* and *Niños*, will be from different theoretical perspectives. In order to deepen on the theme just exposed, power relations and symbolic language -as a form not of subversion but of disarticulation- the book *Niños* will be approached from the perspective of Japanese aesthetics in Ferrada's fictional voice. Additionally, Barthes' theoretical approach will be the basis for analyzing the work *Mexique*, since it gives us the keys to that deeper study encouraged by Hollindale.

4. Own translation.

5. The translation is our own. The italics of the original text have been respected.

6. Own translation.

7. His analysis focuses on album books, which are open, more than narrative, to these symbolic interpretations because of their interplay between text and image.

8. A form of short Japanese poetry with which Ferrada's texts share many characteristics, such as, for example, allusions to elements of nature.

Mexique and cultural myths

Mexique, the Name of the Ship, tells the story of 456 Spanish children who, fleeing the civil war in their country, set sail for Morelia (Mexico), leaving their family and homeland behind. What was to be a three or four-month separation is transformed into a definitive exile during the outbreak of World War II.

Migrations in general is a current topic in children's and young adult literature, given that they are part of the reality in which society is immersed and as Teresa Colomer (2018) exposes "...when there is a change in lifestyles or social values, it is frequent that [...] stories that deliberately want to deal with this topic are written" (p. 128).

However, there are several ways to tell this story. How to approach this reality without simplifying its multiple complexities?

How to get to its essence? How to make ideology not the central theme of the work? To try to elucidate how the author strips herself in principle of ideology or moral messages - such as welcoming immigration or equal rights - and how the author's work is not based on ideology or moral messages, or so many other politically correct topics that usually appear in migration books for children and young people, as already mentioned, the text *Mythologies* by Roland Barthes (2008) will be taken as a theoretical frame of reference. It is the poetic language elaborated by the author that would allow us to go beyond or resist cultural myths, which are partly responsible for the creation of a collective imaginary.

Let us remember that a myth, for Barthes, is a speech defined by its intention. In a book whose protagonists are children, victims of a complex and violent political and social situation, it would be easy to fall into these myths. Whether associated with their skin color, country of origin, religion, culture, or political party - in the work at hand in particular. Even to their status as orphaned children or victims of war. Or conversely, because of the country that receives them, think of the myth of the savage or uncivilized. Barthes mentions as one of the constant features of all mythology "...this impotence to imagine the other. Otherness is the most unpleasant concept for 'common sense'" (p. 48).

The dangerous thing about myth is that it transforms history into nature, that is why "...it is experienced as an innocent word; not because its intentions are hidden [...] but because they are naturalized" (p. 224). They are so internalized that sometimes they even emerge against the ideology they are intended to convey.

Stories are generally told from a unique perspective, since the author's gaze often cannot escape the conception of the world, the assumptions and social beliefs that he or she unwittingly reproduces. They are there and all-encompassing. They are "...nowhere and everywhere, like a sky, a horizon..." (p. 61).

Hence the value of a vision such as Ferrada's, where sensations and experience, and the journey are at the center of the story. Through poetic language, the meaning of the experience is highlighted so that the receiver can encounter it.

For the same reason, it is not possible in the text to distinguish characteristics that can be attributed to children from Asia, Europe or Africa. We do not know what war it is about or even the historical moment, thus blurring the geographical and temporal lines, and with them, also the ideological ones. Poetic language also has the power to liberate stereotypes. We do not know where these children are from or where they are going, only that the war led them on a journey. It does not emphasize differences, but rather unifies experiences. As can be seen in the example below: "I don't quite remember where the country we're going to/ But it's far away./ We'll be there until everything calms down./ Three or four months./ Like a bit of a long vacation. That's what my mom said/ My mom who when she said goodbye said: *my boy*."

Poetic language, according to Barthes, is a language that strives to transform the sign into meaning: "...[contemporary] poetry disturbs language, increases as much as possible the abstraction of the concept and the arbitrariness of the sign and distends to the limit of what is possible, the relationship between the signifier and the signified" (p. 227). Which is what María José Ferrada does in this book: by privileging experience, she blurs the sign and transforms it into meaning. By recoloring meanings, she ceases to be "...a condescending prisoner of other people's meanings" (Hollindale, 1998, p. 15).⁹ How does she define, in these terms, war for example? "War is a very loud noise./ War is a huge hand that shakes you and throws you into a boat."

The author uses resources of this language such as metaphors, anaphoras, personifications, to keep ideology at bay. This is how the message, the myth, is diluted in the sensations provoked by the reading. As can be seen below: "We set sail and the adults remain on the shore until they become minuscule / Fathers, mothers are now stars that look from afar / Fires that someone lit a million years ago."

Ferrada transforms horror into beauty with her special way of looking at what surrounds her. Ferrada (2017) says: "Poetry is not only a text, it is a look, which manifests itself in a text..." (n.p.). And, through it,

9. Own translation.

she manages to make the world a kinder place. “Sometimes we sing / One begins and the rest of us follow / The songs have always been in our pockets, / among the few clothes we wear.”

We attend the journey of the 456 children, not to judge but to understand, to feel with them. As this passage shows: “Some of them cry. Especially at night,/ They say they dream of the earth falling apart,/ The houses fall apart and their memory goes blank,/ Clara, Sonia, Eulalia, María wake us up,/ They say it is only a dream,/ One that several of us dream at the same time,/ Clara, Sonia, Eulalia, María, our sisters,/ They collect the tears in handkerchiefs and in the morning/ They return them to the sea.”

The readers are witnesses to the experiences of these children. Their sensations, feelings, doubts. It offers a window to their inner world with all the nuances that such a complex subject requires. Sadness, nostalgia, uncertainty, pain, hope, innocence are shown. It is a reading that favors an approach to the emotions and the understanding of the other. As the author stated: “Before Chileans, Mexicans or Spaniards, children are children” (Ferrada, 2017, n.p.).

We are forced to reflect, to ask questions, it challenges us to see an uncomfortable reality. It is a sensitive and profound reading. It allows us to take a step further in understanding the diversity and complexity of human life, the goal of all literature, which, as Julio Mata (2014) argues, it shares with ethics.

And above all, this perspective, this voice, that of the child, does not understand prejudices, it is clean, it is free. That freedom that *grown-ups* are losing, invoking once again *The Little Prince*. The voice that María José Ferrada brings us is based on an attentive observation, respectful of the child’s gaze. We recognize in this voice what Michèle Petit (1999) opportunely observed: “Artists preserve a proximity with the child or adolescent they once were, they allow themselves to be inundated by him” (p. 47). Let us look at the following paragraph: “We play to imagine our destiny:/ Morelia is a color./ Morelia is the name of a soft animal./ Morelia is a fruit.”

In this fragment of the text, in the name of *Morelia*, the word emerges free for new meanings. That game without ties which is so typical of children. That reinvention that moves away from any convention. Morelia is no longer a geographical place. It is something more, it encompasses more dimensions. Ferrada would thus have what Borges proclaims in the poem *A Rose and Milton*: “...that gift of naming for the first time...”. Or as exemplified by Graciela Montes (2001) citing research by Jean Piaget: “Names are what you can see when you look at things” (p. 55).

Going back to Barthes (2008) we can understand why and how Ferrada breaks with any myth because: “...its limits are formal, not substantial” (p. 200). What María José Ferrada achieves is a sensitive look on the migrant, exiled or displaced; where the perception, the beauty of the text stands out over any ideology, myth or collective imaginary.

Children and Japanese aesthetics

Niños (2013) is a set of short texts headed by a proper name to which they refer, which speak of small details of childhood: memories, treasures, dreams associated with these names. They are poetic texts that give an account of pieces of childhood. Childhoods, in this case, broken by the military dictatorship in Chile.

Each name is related to an instant, an object, a feeling that evokes it. The exercise that the author does is to give singularity to each one, to take them out of anonymity, out of the abstract representation of the number to individualize them and make them unique. She allows us to approach the image she elaborates of them through simple words that describe objects, places or moments that arise from contemplation. They are a direct impression of the writer, stripped of artifice. In all cases, enjoyment and personal perception are placed in the main position, “...the intimate fact of listening to one’s own perception” (Pound, 2000, p.11). Thus, for example, to remember Marco we read the following: “The rain had begun to fall/ And he thought that if he kept all the drops/ In the buckets that were in the courtyard,/ He could make something with them/ A sea, for example.”

That’s Marco, or that’s what the word Marco evokes, or maybe that’s part of childhood. In any case, Ferrada only tells us that. He keeps us away from information, from reason, from the data that “...big people...”, as *The Little Prince* tells us, would need to (believe) to know Marco. We do not know, we do not need to know, Marco’s age or the characteristics of his house, for example, to get closer to his most personal universe, to his inner self; to imagine him.

So where does this sensitivity, this vision of childhood, come from? Like The Little Prince himself, he also comes from a distant land. In this case it is Japan. Origin of a very particular aesthetic that can be glimpsed in Ferrada’s texts, which echoes in them, giving rise to this voice that characterizes her works. A voice that stops in the present, and not in the past.

According to Donald Keene, in *The Pleasures of Japanese Literature* (2018), the text that will guide this analysis, four aesthetic elements or principles can be identified that bring us closer to the Japanese sense of beauty: suggestiveness, irregularity, simplicity, and perishability.

Suggestion, the first of the principles, refers to evocation, to naming without naming, which gives rise to the play of the imagination, expanding it instead of limiting it, and where each reader establishes the limits he or she will be able to reach. For example, under *Gabriel's* name we read the following: “He likes to imagine that the stars are holes in the sky,/ That when the sun hides, the earth is covered by a black coat,// It is so old that it has holes,/ That’s why the light.”

But suggestion is also found in “...beginnings that evoke what follows, or endings that suggest what was...” (Keene, 2018, p. 19), as in *Alejandra's* case. “For the first time she will see it coming.// Her mother makes her sleep/ with a song in which she tells her that the flowers will come.// A lullaby that says that the birds will come and that the sun/ will be a little shelter.// For the first time, spring.”

Under this aesthetic premise, beauty is found more in the limits, in the possibilities offered by language, than in its concreteness.

The second feature of Japanese aesthetics corresponds to irregularity, which includes the imperfect, the unfinished and asymmetry. In literature this translates into the avoidance of parallelism, and in the irregular number of lines in poetry. A good example of this is the haiku (a form also explored by Ferrada, 2017b), which is composed of seventeen syllables spread over three lines (5/7/5, unlike the predominant forms in other countries with four-line stanzas). The irregularity in the form, thus understood, accentuates the beauty of the content, makes it more personal, and therefore, would be more moving. This is a characteristic feature of Ferrada’s writing. Let’s look at *Felipe's* example. “He likes to watch/ how the light bulb/ that illuminates his room turns on and off // It’s like a miniature sun // He wonders if anyone else has noticed it.”

In this text, Keene’s quote illustrates this aspect: “In all things, uniformity is a defect. It is interesting to leave something incomplete and unfinished; then one will have the feeling that through this imperfection the life of beings is prolonged” (p. 20).

The third characteristic mentioned is simplicity. This is manifested in Ferrada’s aesthetics, in her unadorned language, neither pretentious nor forced. It is a close, subtle language, without unnecessary ornaments, just the right words. A perfect synthesis, as can be appreciated in the text under the name *Jaime*. “He will count all the flowers in the world/ That fit in a springtime./ Then he will classify them by aromas and colors./ He will start with the ones that grow in his street.” In *Mi cuaderno de Haikus*, Ferrada (2017b) notes about simplicity that “...more than a form of writing, haiku is a way to learn to look at the world” (p. 62).

And finally, something very typical of Japanese taste, the ephemeral, as a characteristic of beauty. The only way we can be moved by that “...small, yellow flight”, as the author herself defines the autumn tree leaf, is by its impermanence, by its fragility, by its death or disappearance. Fragility as a condition of beauty, but also, of course, as a condition of childhood. *Orlando* exemplifies this: “He spent the afternoon drawing insects/ He took them to the garden and left them walking in a row/ From the smallest to the largest/ Little by little they became disordered: some went through the grass/ and others climbed the branches of the apple tree/ Finally he lost sight of them. It happens like that with insects” (Ferrada, 2013).

This verse, where everything disappears and is thus accepted, fulfills the deepest sense of beauty in the Japanese conception. We appreciate most those things that cannot last. Knowing and accepting this fragility, whether through disappearance or death, is what completes the concept of beauty.

Another implicit element to highlight at this point is the observation of the passage of time in nature and the sensitivity towards this phenomenon. It invites us to relate to the environment from this poetic dimension, where the human being and nature are part of a whole. Both conditions can be observed again and again in Ferrada’s texts. The connections and allusions to nature are a constant in her writing. As are the exaltation of the senses, and the capture of a precise instant (which also refers to the aesthetics of haikus). What better way to evoke the ephemeral than with these lines under the name *Magla*. “If she had to choose just one sound,/ she says she would choose the sound that bubbles make/ as they disappear.// With a little effort she can hear it.// Look attentively at the small transparent universes/ that start with a breath and move through the small galaxy of her house/ to then disappear.// Like this: plap plap plap plap plap plap.”

By linking these four characteristics of Japanese aesthetics with Ferrada’s writing, there is no doubt of the influence they exerted on her. A search for beauty in every line. Time, reflection, imagination and sensitivity are required for their enjoyment. They provoke a purely aesthetic enjoyment, as they are deep impressions of the author, a poetic approach to the world around her.

This work, as the title indicates, is about children, no more and no less. María José Ferrada keeps the memory of these children alive by transforming the texts into images, which, like looking at a photograph, always shows the instant of life captured. It is the essence of each child that she discovers with her attentive gaze. The imagined essence, evoked by each name, that is, by language.

It could be said that Ferrada participates in that Japanese sensibility “...to feel nature, to find meaning in the fall of a leaf or any gesture, and to capture instants of profound aesthetic awareness...” (Keene, 2018, p. 57).

Yet Ferrada’s language shares with Japanese aesthetics something even more fundamental: its function, its utility. The purpose of Japanese poetry is not to convey practical or useful information, nor is it after an objective truth, but seeks “...to express the poet’s perception of beauty” (p. 59). It seeks aesthetic pleasure by distancing itself from any teaching. It is this same fundamental characteristic that again makes it transcend barriers.

The adult normativity Nikolajeva is concerned with disintegrates, because the poet goes a step beyond establishing herself in fiction from one point of view or another (that of the child or the adult). From the perspective of Japanese aesthetics, the poet must forget even himself and make himself available to what he observes, not give his opinion, but rather let what he observes, speak.

The reification implicit in this approach is also reversed by restoring, through subjectification, the humanity of these children.

Without intending to do so, but rather, by ascribing his writing to an aesthetic focused on emotional states and the poetic perception of nature, no power tensions are generated, there are no hegemonic visions, because there is simply no other voice than the one that emerges from the sensitive world, irreducible to age divisions.

Beauty above all else

María José Ferrada’s writing is a constant inquiry into the path of beauty. She frees language from all its ties, strips it of any temporal or spatial reference, leaving only the essential. She manages to grasp the ungraspable, something as fleeting as beauty. That is where its strength lies.

An underlying element in her writing is the sense of hope. Despite the difficulties of life, such as displacement or extreme political situations seen in the two works analyzed, beauty always has the possibility and power to enrich the world. Ferrada discovers it through language.

This is also why her literature is unclassifiable: is it literature for children or for adults? There is no answer, nor is it the intended objective, since what brings Ferrada closer to her reader is the right to beauty, to a form of knowledge through the senses, which only for that reason, is closer to childhood. Only because reason tends to dominate reason, technical, utilitarian language, and where curiosity, astonishment, and the capacity for symbolization become increasingly narrower. Something that the Little Prince had already observed a long time ago:

If you say to big people: “I have seen a beautiful house of red bricks with geraniums in the windows and pigeons on the roof...” they will not be able to imagine the house. It is necessary to tell them: “I have seen a house of a hundred thousand francs.” Then they exclaim: “How beautiful it is!” [...] Children must be very indulgent with big people (Saint-Exupéry, 2014, p. 20).

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4. Awards



In recognition of her career, María José Ferrada has received the following awards and distinctions:

- Filo Chamacxos Tribute at the Oaxaca International Book Fair (2024).
- Nominated four times for the Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award ALMA (2024-2021).
- Cervantes Chico Ibero-American Award (2022).
- Ibero-American SM Award for Children’s and Young Adult Literature (2021).

Awards and Recognitions for Specific Works

El lenguaje de las cosas (The Language of Things)

- Oreste Pelagatti Città di Tronto Poetry Award, 2018, Italy.

El idioma secreto (The Secret Language)

- Cuatrogatos Foundation Award, 2014, USA.
- Banco del Libro Award, 2014, Venezuela.
- Ciudad de Orihuela International Poetry Award for Children, 2012, Spain.

Niños (Children)

- Paterson Prize for Books for Young People, 2022, USA.
- Bologna Ragazzi Awards, Poetry Mention, 2021, Italy.
- Fundação Nacional do Livro Infantil e Juvenil Award, Best Translation, 2021, Brazil.
- IBBY Honour List, Writer Category, 2015, Chile.
- Chilean Academy of Language Award, 2014, Chile.
- Municipal Literature Award of Santiago, Youth Literature Category, 2014, Chile.

Las memorias de Hugo, el chancho de tierra (Hugo’s Memoire the Pill Bug)

- Best Digital Publication Award, Ministry of Cultures, 2017, Chile.

Notas al margen (Notes in the Margin)

- Marta Brunet Award, Ministry of Cultures, 2014, Chile.
- Colibrí Medal, IBBY Chile, 2014, Chile.

Escondido (Hidden)

- Cuatrogatos Foundation Award, 2016, USA.

Frutarte, Animalarte y Transportarte (Fruit Art, Animal Art, Transport Art)

- Colibrí Medal, IBBY Chile, 2017, Chile.

Transportarte (Transport Art)

- Marta Brunet Award, Ministry of Cultures, 2017, Chile.

Un jardín (A Garden)

- Bologna Ragazzi Awards, Fiction Mention, 2017, Italy.

La tristeza de las cosas (The Sadness of Things)

- Cuatrogatos Foundation Award, 2018, USA.

Mexique, el nombre del barco (Mexique, the Name of the Ship)

- Best Picture Books of 2020 List, Kirkus Reviews, 2021, USA.
- Malka Penn Award for Human Rights in Children’s Literature, Honor Book, 2021, USA.
- Selo Distinção Excelência em Literatura Infantil e Juvenil, UNESCO Reading Chair, 2021, Brazil.
- Special Mention, Premio Nati per Leggere, 2019, Italy.

Mi cuaderno de haikus (My Haiku Notebook)

- Colibrí Medal, Poetry Category, IBBY Chile, 2017, Chile.

Animal (Animal)

- Graphic Arts Award of the National Chamber of the Mexican Publishing Industry, 2019, Mexico.

Mi barrio (My Neighborhood)

- BRAW Amazing Bookshelf at the Bologna Children’s Book Fair, 2022, Italy.
- Selo Seleção Qualidade em Literatura Infantil e Juvenil, UNESCO Reading Chair, 2021, Brazil.

Los derechos de los niños. Un árbol de pan, un abrigo y una nube donde jugar (The Rights of Children. A Breadfruit Tree, a Coat, and a Cloud to Play On)

- Colibrí Medal, Poetry Category, IBBY Chile, 2019, Chile.

Cuando fuiste nube (When You Were a Cloud)

- Bavarian Free State Publishing Award, 2023, Germany.
- Hispano-American Poetry Award for Children, 2018, Mexico.

El bolso (The Purse)

- Bologna Ragazzi Awards, New Horizons, 2023, Italy.
- White Ravens Selection, Internationale Jugendbibliothek of Munich, 2021, Germany.
- Cuatrogatos Foundation Award, 2016, USA.

Proyecto Toshima (Toshima Project)

- Editorial Art Award of the National Chamber of the Mexican Publishing Industry, 2022, Mexico.

Books for Young People and Adults

Kramp

- IBBY Honour List, Translation Category, 2024, Brazil.
- Shortlist LiBeraturpreis, 2022, Germany.
- A San Francisco Chronicle Best Book of the Year, 2021, USA.
- Southwest Review Best Book of the Year, 2021, USA.
- Fundação Nacional do Livro Infantil e Juvenil Award, Best Translation for Young Readers, 2021, Brazil.
- Best Literary Works Award, Novel Category, awarded by the Ministry of Cultures, 2018, Chile.
- Municipal Literature Award of Santiago, 2018, Chile.
- Best Novel Award, Circle of Art Critics, 2017, Chile.

Había luz o algo parecido a la luz (There Was Light or Something Like Light)

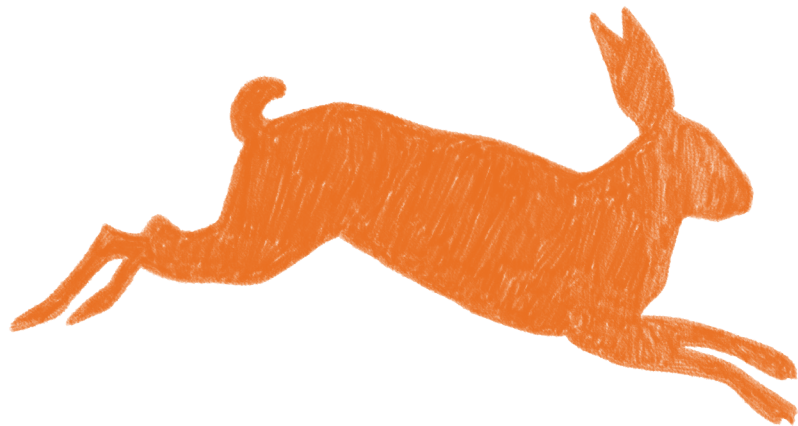
- Publishing Award, Chilean Book Chamber, 2020, Chile.

El hombre del cartel (The Man on the Billboard)

- AISI Translation Award (Italian Association of Ibero-American Studies, 2024, Italy.
- Washington Post Best Book of December 2022, USA.
- Best Novel Award, Circle of Art Critics, 2022, Chile.
- Longlist Queen Sofía Spanish Institute Translation Prize, 2022, USA.

Diario de Japón (Diary of Japan)

- Best Nonfiction Book Award, Circle of Art Critics, 2023, Chile.





5. Bibliography of Published Books



12 historias minúsculas de la Tierra, el cielo y el mar

(12 Tiny Stories of the Earth, the Sky, and the Sea)

Illus. by Karina Letelier, Chile, Self-editing, 2006.

Un mundo raro (A Strange World)

Illus. by Motoko Toda, Chile, Libros del Cardo, 2017.

Illus. by Nicolas Troshinnsky, España, Kalandraka, 2010.

El lenguaje de las cosas (The Language of Things)

Illus. by Pep Carrió, España, El jinete azul, 2011.

El baile diminuto (The Tiny Dance)

Illus. by Sole Poirot, España, Kalandraka, 2011.

Animalario (Bestiary)

Illus. by María Ergueta, España, Oxford University Press, 2012.

Geografía de máquinas (Geography of Machines)

Illus. by Fito Holloway, Chile, Pehuén, 2012.

El idioma secreto (The Secret Language)

Illus. by Zuzanna Celej, España, Faktoría K, 2013.

Niños (Children)

Illus. by Maria Elena Valdés, Chile, Liberalia, 2020.

Illus. by Jorge Quien, Chile, Gráfito, 2013.

Las memorias de Hugo, el chancho de tierra

(Hugo’s Memoirethe Pill Bug)

Illus. by Francisca Yáñez, Chile, Editorial Patagonia, 2013.

Notas al margen (Notes in the Margin)

Illus. by Azul López, México, Alboroto, 2020.

Illus. by Francisca Yáñez, Chile, Alfaguara, 2013.

Escondido (Hidden)

Illus. by Rodrigo Marín, Chile, Ocho Libros, 2014.

El día de Manuel (Manuel’s Day)

Illus. by Pato Mena, Chile, Alfaguara, 2014.

Pájaros (Birds)

Illus. by Fito Holloway, Argentina, Pequeño editor, 2015.

Animalarte (Animal Art)

Illus. by Various Artists, Chile, Ekaré Sur, 2016.

Transportarte (Transporting Art)

Illus. by Various Artists, Chile, Ekaré Sur, 2016.

Frutarte (Fruit Art)

Illus. by Various Artists, Chile, Ekaré Sur, 2016.

Tienes un vestido blanco (You Have a White Dress)

Illus. by Arianne Faber, España, A buen paso, 2015.

El árbol de las cosas (The Tree of Things)

Illus. by Miguel Pang, España, A buen paso, 2015.

¿Quién es Juan? (Who is Juan?)

Illus. by Christopher Eitner, Chile, Planeta lector, 2015.

Un jardín (A Garden)

Illus. by Isidro Ferrer, España, A buen paso, 2016.

Otro país (Another Country)

Illus. by Francisca Yáñez, Chile, Planeta lector, 2016.

El interior de los colores (The Interior of Colors)

Illus. by Rodrigo Marín, Chile, Planeta lector, 2016.

La infancia de Max Bill (The Childhood of Max Bill)

Illus. by Rodrigo Marín, Chile, Santillana, 2016.

Las visiones fantásticas (The Fantastic Visions)

Illus. by Amalia Restrepo, Colombia, Tragaluz, 2017.

La tristeza de las cosas (The Sadness of Things)

Illus. by Pep Carrió, Chile, Amanuta, 2016.

Mexique, el nombre del barco (Mexique, the Name of the Ship)

Illus. by Ana Penyas, México, Tecolote / Alboroto, 2017.

Mi cuaderno de haikus (My Haiku Notebook)

Illus. by Leonor Pérez, Chile, Amanuta, 2017.

Agua (Water)

Illus. by María Elena Valdés, México, Castillo, 2017.

Manuel, un día de campo (Manuel, a Day in the Countryside)

Illus. by Pato Mena, Japón, Kaisei-sha, 2017.

Animal (Animal)

Illus. by Ana Palmero y Mónica Bergna, México, Alboroto Ediciones, 2018.

Sábados (Saturdays)

Illus. by Marcelo Escobar, Chile, Ekare Sur, 2018.

El viaje de arbóreo (The Journey of Arbóreo)

Illus. by Karina Letelier, Chile, Planeta lector, 2018.

Los derechos de los niños. Un árbol de pan, un abrigo y una nube donde jugar

(The Rights of Children. A Breadfruit Tree, a Coat, and a Cloud to Play On)

Illus. by Francisca Yáñez, Chile, Planeta lector, 2018.

Guardianes (Spirit Guardians)

Illus. by Mo Gutiérrez, Chile, Amanuta, 2018.

Mi barrio (My Neighborhood)

Illus. by Ana Penyas, México, Alboroto, 2018.

Los animales eléctricos (The Electric Animals)

Illus. by Toyohiko Kokumai, España, A buen paso, 2018.

¡Piú!

Illus. by Magdalena Pérez, Chile, Liebre, 2018.

Un albero, una gatta, un fratello (A Tree, a Cat, a Brother)

Italia, Topipittori, 2019.

El idioma de los animales (The Language of Animals)

Illus. by Miguel Pang, España, A buen paso, 2019.

Tea y Camaléon son hermanos (Tea and Chameleon Are Siblings)

Illus. by Koichiro Kashima, España, A buen paso, 2019.

Cuando fuiste nube (When You Were a Cloud)

Illus. by Azul López, México, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2019.

Un árbol (Tree)

Illus. by Francisca Yáñez, Chile, Parque por la Paz Villa Grimaldi, 2019.

El espacio entre la hierba (The Space Between the Grass)

Illus. by Azul López, México, Alboroto, 2020.

Zum Zum, el viaje de la semilla (Zum Zum, the Journey of the Seed)

Illus. by Marco Paschetta, España, A Buen Paso, 2021.

Casas (Houses)

Illus. by Pep Carrió, México, Alboroto, 2021.

Espantamiedos (Fear Scarer)

Illus. by Karina Letelier, Chile, Escrito con tiza, 2021.

Natura (Natur)

Illus. by Mariana Alcántara, México, Alboroto, 2021.

El bolso (The Purse)

Illus. by Ana Palmero, México, Alboroto, 2021.

Nadadores (Swimmers)

Illus. by Mariana Alcántara, México, Alboroto, 2021.

Proyecto Toshima (Toshima Project)

Illus. by Isidro Ferrer, México, Alboroto 2022.

El futuro (Future)

Illus. by Mariana Alcántara, México, Alboroto, 2022.

Crear una galaxia es simple (Creating a Galaxy is Simple)

Illus. by Karina Letelier, Argentina, Ojoreja, 2022.

Plap Plap, el corazón de la lluvia (Plap Plap, the Heart of the Rain)

Illus. by Marco Paschetta, España, A Buen Paso, 2023.

Animales secretos (Secret Animals)

Illus. by Mariana Alcántara, México, Alboroto, 2023.

La soledad de los peces (The Loneliness of the Fish)

Illus. by Mariana Alcántara, México, Alboroto, 2023.

La máquina de mirar estrellas (The Machine for Watching Stars)

Illus. by Carmen Cardemil, Chile, Viva Leer Copec, 2024.

La historia comentada de Isumbochi (The Commented Story of Isumbochi)

Illus. by Emilia Aravena, Chile, Cabeza Hueca, 2024.

El día que el zorro vino volando (The Day the Fox Came Flying)

Illus. by Issa Watanabe, Perú, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2024.

Siete apariciones (Seven Apparitions)

Illus. by Renee Hao, Chile, Libros del Escuinle, 2024.

Books for Young People and Adults

Kramp

Chile, Emecé, 2017.

Había luz o algo parecido a la luz (There Was Light or Something Like Light)

Chile, Editorial Universidad de Santiago, 2020.

El hombre del cartel (The Man on the Billboard)

Chile, Alquimia, 2021.

Diario de Japón (Diary of Japan)

Chile, Seix Barral, 2022.

Books translated into other languages

El lenguaje de las cosas (The Language of Things)

· Italian, Topipittori, 2017.

El baile diminuto (The Tiny Dance)

· Galician, Kalandraka, 2011.

Niños (Children)

· Portuguese, Pallas, 2021.

· Italian, Edicola, 2021.

· English, Eerdmans Books for Young Readers, 2021.

Escondido (Hidden)

· Portuguese, Ozé, 2016.

El día de Manuel (Manuel’s Day)

· Japanese, Kaisei-sha, 2017.

El árbol de las cosas (The Tree of Things)

· Catalan, A buen Paso, 2023.

· Hindi, A&A Books, 2019.

· Portuguese, Livros da matriz, 2019.

Un jardín (A Garden)

· Catalan, A buen Paso, 2023.

· Italian, A buen Paso, 2023.

Mexique, el nombre del barco (Mexique, the Name of the Ship)

· Italian, Edizioni Clichy, 2021.

· Portuguese, Pallas, 2021.

· English, Eerdmans Books for Young Readers, 2020.

· Catalan, Libros del Zorro Rojo, 2017.

Mi barrio (My Neighborhood)

· Portuguese, Pallas, 2021.

· English, Tapioca Stories, 2020.

¡Piú! (Tweet!)

· Japanese, World Library, 2021.

· English, Barefoot Books, 2020.

Tea y Camaléon son hermanos (Tea and Chameleon Are Siblings)

· Rumanian, Katartis, 2022.

· Catalan, A buen Paso, 2019.

El idioma de los animales (The Language of Animals)

· Catalan, A buen Paso, 2019.

Cuando fuiste nube (When You Were Cloud)

· German, Hagebutte Verlag, 2023.

El espacio entre la hierba (The Space Between the Grass)

· German, Hagebutte Verlag, 2024.

· Portuguese, Ozé, 2023.

· Korean, Mokyoil Publishing Co, 2023.

· Italian, Raum Italic, 2022.

Zum Zum, el viaje de la semilla (Zum Zum, the Journey of the Seed)

· Portuguese, Via Lúdica, 2025.

· French, Plume de carotte, 2022.

· Catalan, A buen Paso, 2021.

Casas (Houses)

· Italian, Topipittori, 2022.

Natura (Natur)

· English, Tapioca Stories, 2024.

· Maya, Alboroto, 2022.

Nadadores (Swimmers)

· Italian, Raum Italic, 2022.

· English, Tapioca Stories, 2022.

El futuro (Future)

· English, Tapioca Stories, 2024.

Plap Plap, el corazón de la lluvia (Plap Plap, the Heart of the Rain)

· Korean, Dearpoopoo, 2025.

· Portuguese, Via Lúdica, 2025.

· Italian, Aboca Kids Edizioni, 2024.

· Catalan, A buen Paso, 2023.

Kramp

· German, Büchergilde Gutenberg, 2023.

· French, Quidam Editions, 2023.

· Icelandic, Angústúra, 2023.

· Portuguese (Portugal), Questão Pentagonal, 2023.

· Polish, Claroscuro, 2022.

· Hungarian, Metropolis, 2022.

· Turkish, CAN Yayinlari, 2022.

· English, Tin House, 2021.

· German, Berenberg Verlag, 2021.

· Portugues (Brazilian), Editora Moinhos, 2020.

· Danish, Jensen & Dalgaard, 2020.

· Italian, Edicola, 2018.

El hombre del cartel (The Man on the Billboard)

· French, Quidam Editions, 2025.

· German, Berenberg Verlag, 2023.

· Italian, Edicola, 2023.

· English, Tin House, 2022.

· Danish, Jensen og Dalgaard, 2022.

· Portuguese, Moinhos, 2022.

In 2022, the author was invited by the Mexican Government’s Ministry of Culture to write a collection of poems inviting children to celebrate the end of the pandemic and the possibility of meeting their friends in person again. The collection of poems Toc Toc mi corazón, available online, was illustrated by ten artists from different countries -among them Isol, Gabriel Pacheco and Katsumi Komagata- and traveled to different cities around the country in a traveling exhibition. It was translated into indigenous languages:

Didxazá

Ngiva

Kumiay

Mixe

Tu ´un savi Mixteco

Náhuatl

O´dam Tepehuano del sur bajo

Totonaco

Tseltal

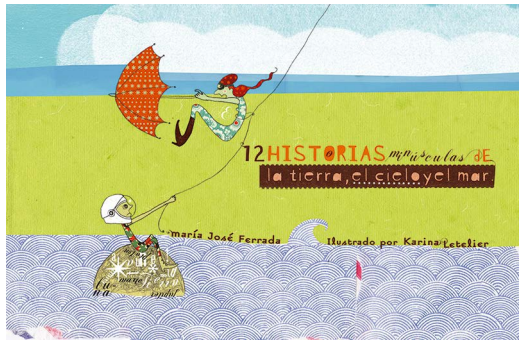
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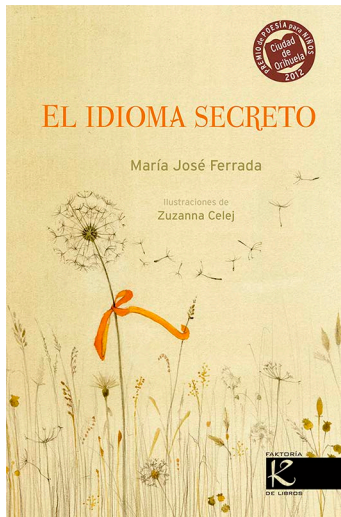


6. Ten Most Important Titles

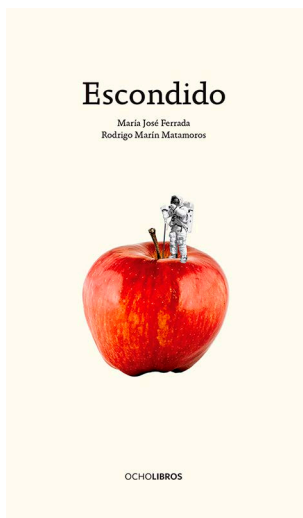




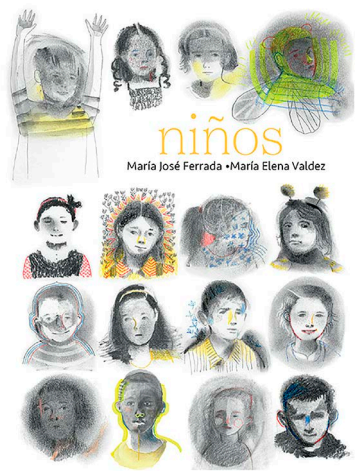
12 historias minúsculas de la Tierra, el cielo y el mar
(12 Tiny Stories of the Earth, the Sky, and the Sea)
Illus. by Karina Letelier, Chile, Self-editing, 2006.



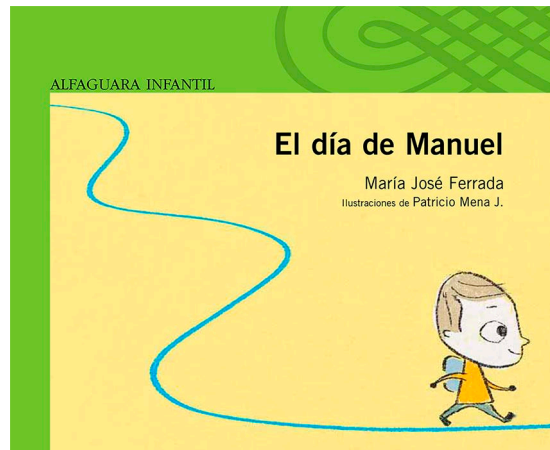
El idioma secreto (The Secret Language)
Illus. by Zuzanna Celej, España, Factoría K, 2013.



Escondido (Hidden)
Illus. by Rodrigo Marín, Chile, Ocho Libros, 2014.



Niños (Children)
Illus. by Jorge Quien, Chile, Gráfito, 2013.
Illus. by Maria Elena Valdés, Chile, Liberalia, 2020.



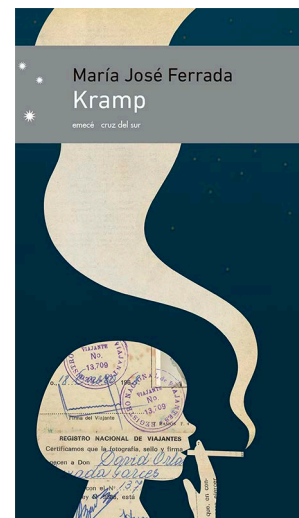
El día de Manuel (Manuel's Day)
Illus. by Pato Mena, Chile, Santillana, 2014.



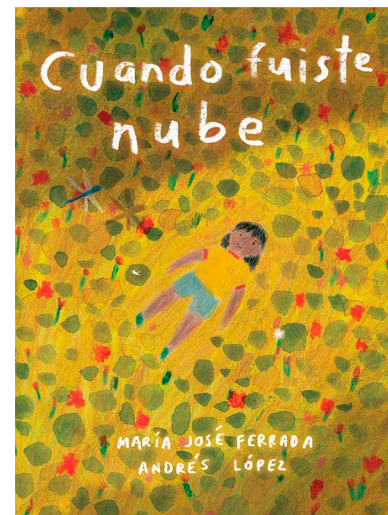
Un jardín (A Garden)
Illus. by Isidro Ferrer, España, A buen paso, 2016.



Mexique, el nombre del barco
(Mexique, the Name of the Ship)
Illus. Ana Penyas, México, Tecolote/Alboroto, 2017.



Kramp
Chile, Emecé, 2017.



Cuando fuiste nube (When You Were Cloud)
Illus. by Azul López, México, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2019.



El bolso (The Purse)
Illus. by Ana Palmero, México, Alboroto, 2021.



7. A Selection of Five Books
Presented to the Jurors



Niños (Children)

Illus. by Maria Elena Valdés, Chile, Liberalia, 2020.

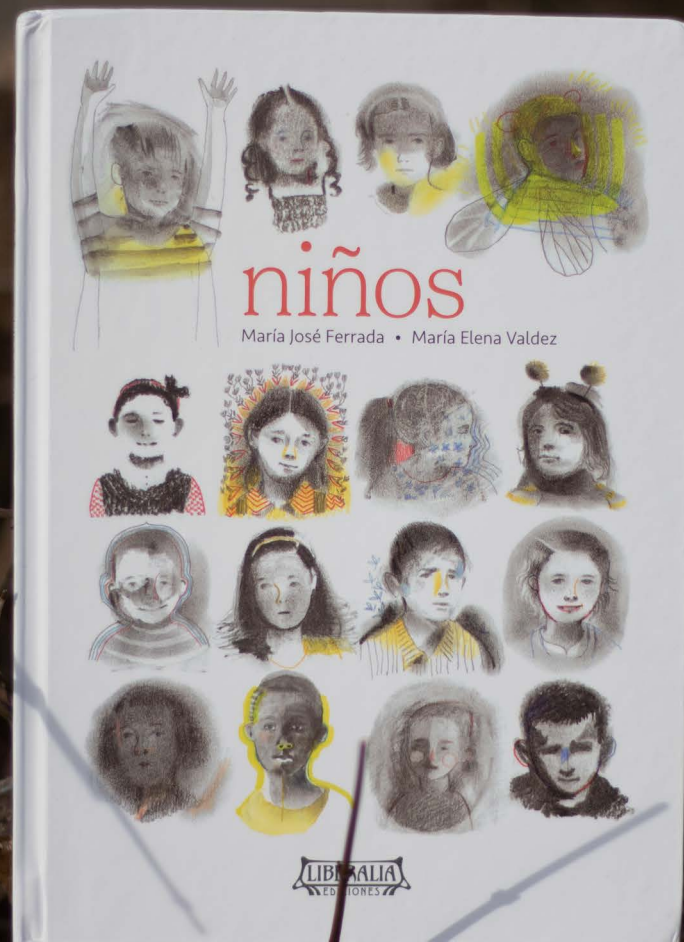
Illus. by Jorge Quien, Chile, Gráfito, 2013.

On September 11, 1973, a military coup plunged Chile into seventeen long years of dictatorial rule. It was only the return of democracy that could reveal the full horrors of Augusto Pinochet's regime: 3,197 people dead or disappeared—including thirty-four children under the age of fourteen.

This book is a stirring memorial to those victims and to the cost of extremism. Thirty-four poems—one for each lost child—consider the diverse hopes of these fragile young lives. From Alicia to Jaime, Héctor to Paola, Soledad to Rafael, they were brave and creative, thoughtful and strong. In these pages, some children watch the seasons change. Some listen for new sounds on rainy afternoons. And some can't wait for their next birthday.

Featuring gentle, emotive poems and soft, pastel-toned illustrations, *Niños* is an unforgettable tribute to the children of Pinochet's Chile and all those threatened by political violence across the world.

(Presentation by Eerdmans Books for Young Readers.)



Translations

- English, Eerdmans Books for Young Readers, 2021.
- Italian, Edicola, 2021.
- Portuguese, Pallas, 2021.

Awards

- Paterson Prize for Books for Young People, 2022, USA.
- Bologna Ragazzi Awards, Poetry Mention, 2021, Italy.
- Fundação Nacional do Livro Infantil e Juvenil Award, Best Translation, 2021, Brazil.
- IBBY Honour List, Writer Category, 2015, Chile.
- Chilean Academy of Language Award, 2014, Chile.
- Municipal Literature Award of Santiago, Youth Literature Category, 2014, Chile.

“(…) we are confronted not only with a work of art that preserves the democratic memory, but also a poem compilation that aims to bring back the lost childhood, the innocence that was cruelly snatched away from those children during the Chilean dictatorship. The author's stance could be described as what Sutherland called the “politics of attack,” an allegation or complaint against the feelings that arise in her in the face of these events that go against her ethical principles and values. Thus, the critique is not expressed through a biographical reflection of the difficulties that each child went through, but rather in the purpose of restoring their childhood through her words, through those bright verses that claim to bring back a warm and motherly environment. In this way, Ferrada's poems wrap the memory of each of those 34 children's names in a warm environment filled with nature, games, and a series of microscopic elements that flow through her verses.” Poetry, Art, and Historical Memory: Fostering Dialogue About War, by Francisco Antonio Martínez-Carratalá & Sebastián Miras. Published in Bookbird: A Journal of International Children's Literature, Vol. 61, No. 3, 2023.



Kramp (How to Order the Universe)

Emecé/Planeta, Chile, 2017.

For seven-year-old M, the world is guided by a firm set of principles, based on her father D’s life as a traveling salesman. Enchanted by her father’s trade, M convinces him to take her along on his routes, selling hardware supplies against the backdrop of Pinochet-era Chile. As father and daughter travel from town to town in their old Renault, M’s memories and thoughts become tied to a language of rural commerce, philosophy, the cosmos, hardware products, and ghosts. M, in her innocence, barely notices the rising tensions and precarious nature of their work until she and her father connect with an enigmatic photographer, E, whose presence threatens to upend the unusual life they’ve created.

María José Ferrada expertly captures a vanishing way of life and a father-daughter relationship on the brink of irreversible change. At once nostalgic, dangerous, sharply funny, and full of delight and wonder, *How to Order the Universe* (Kramp) is a richly imaginative debut and a rare work of magic and originality.

(Presentation by Tin House Publishing.)

Translations

- German, Büchergilde Gutenberg, 2023.
- French, Quidam Editions, 2023.
- Icelandic, Angústúra, 2023.
- Portuguese (Portugal), Questão Pentagonal, 2023.
- Polish, Claroscuro, 2022.
- Hungarian, Metropolis, 2022.
- Turkish, CAN Yayinlari, 2022.
- English, Tin House, 2021.
- German, Berenberg Verlag, 2021.
- Portugues (Brazilian), Editora Moinhos, 2020.
- Danish, Jensen & Dalgaard, 2020.
- Italian, Edicola, 2018.

Other Editions in Spanish

- Colombia, Laguna Libros, 2023.
- Mexico, Dharma Books, 2022.
- Argentina & Uruguay, Emecé Editores, Planeta, 2022.
- Spain, Alianza, 2019.

Awards

- IBBY Honour List, Translation Category, 2024, Brazil.
- Shortlist LiBeraturpreis, 2022, Germany.
- A San Francisco Chronicle Best Book of the Year, 2021, USA.
- Fundação Nacional do Livro Infantil e Juvenil Award, Best Translation for Young Readers, 2021, Brazil.
- Best Literary Works Award, Novel Category, awarded by the Ministry of Cultures, 2018, Chile.
- Municipal Literature Award of Santiago, 2018, Chile.
- Best Novel Award, Circle of Art Critics, 2017, Chile.

“Charming. . . Fans of *The Elegance of the Hedgehog* will want to make time for this one”. The Chicago Review of Books, USA.

“A short work of real delight”. El Mundo, Spain.

“*Kramp* is a wonderfully poetic and imaginative book about an intimate father-daughter relationship and the special world of traveling salesmen”.

Deutschlandfunk Kultur, Germany.

“Magical. Purely magical”. Politiken, Denmark.

“Beautiful in its simplicity, *Kramp* highlights a voice to follow, that of María José Ferrada”. Lire, France.

“This quick and quirky book is as charming as it is unsettling, as appealing as it is wise”. Kirkus, Starred Review, USA.

“Ferrada’s lean novel is simple and complex, it can make you cheerful and sad. Anyone who reads it cannot be disappointed”. Nordkurier, German.

“*Kramp* is an impressive coming-of-age story of a young girl and, though simple on the surface, it dives deep into emotions and into the conflictual history of Chile”. Skald.is, Iceland.

Mexique, el nombre del barco (Mexique, the Name of the Ship)

Illus. by Ana Penyas, Tecolote/Alboroto, México, 2017.

On May 27, 1937, in the midst of the Spanish Civil War, 456 sons and daughters of Republicans boarded the transatlantic ship Mexique, which set sailed from Bordeaux to Mexico. They were initially expected to stay for three or four months, but the Republican defeat and the outbreak of World War II turned their exile into a permanent one.

This picturebook narrates a real event that took place in Spain exactly eighty years ago, told from the perspective of a child—a childlike voice full of nuances (including uncertainty, hope, and innocence) that challenges the euphemism of “collateral damage.” It is also an edition that tells the story of a ship, fully aware that there is no record of all those who cross the ocean every day, transporting human beings who have the right to a dignified life without the ground crumbling beneath their feet.

(Presentation by Libros del Zorro Rojo Publishing.)

Translations

- Italian, Edizioni Clichy, 2021.
- Portuguese, Pallas, 2021.
- English, Eerdmans Books for Young Readers, 2020.
- Catalan, Libros del Zorro Rojo, 2017.

Awards

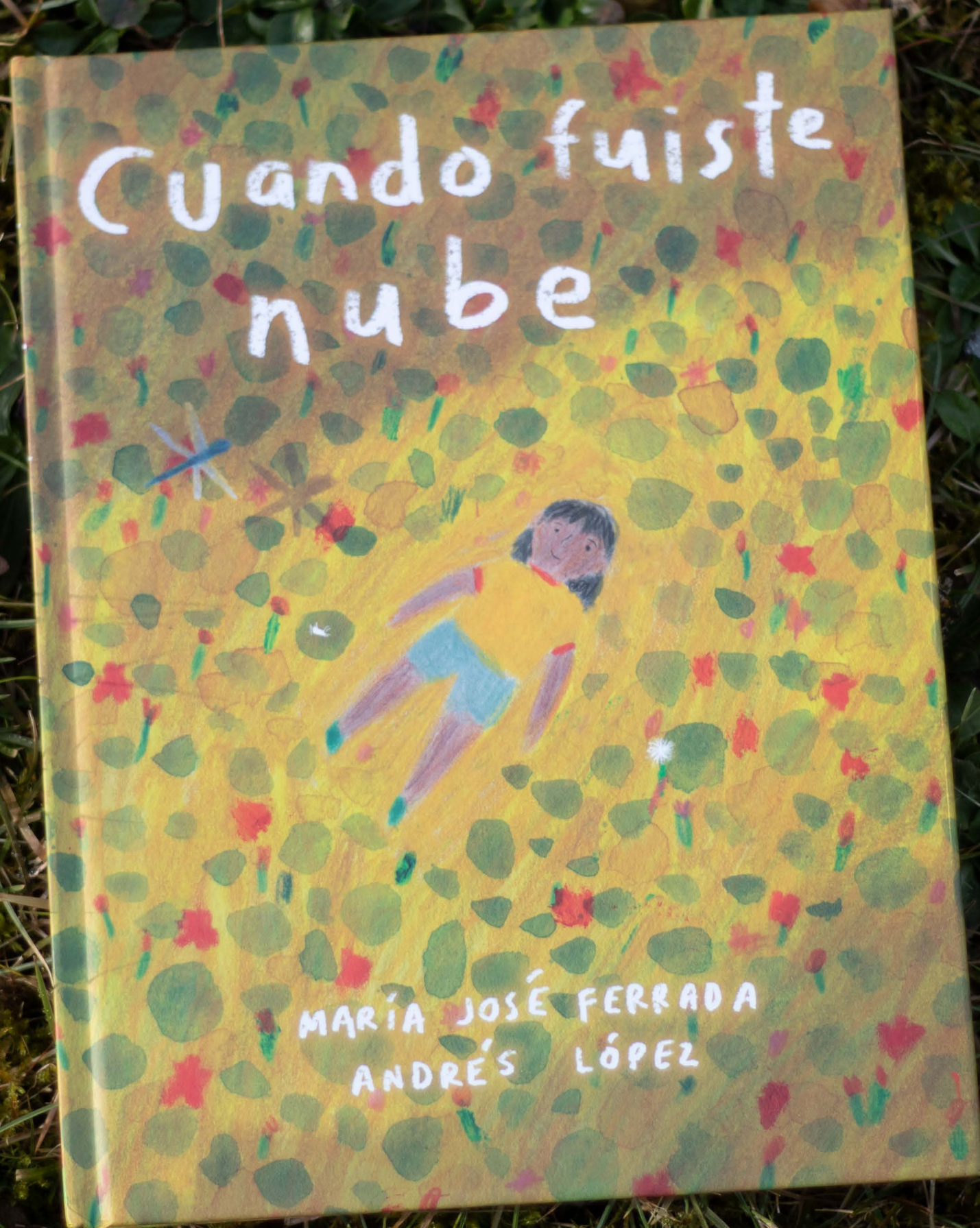
- Best Picture Books of 2020 List, Kirkus Reviews, 2021, USA.
- Malka Penn Award for Human Rights in Children’s Literature, Honor Book, 2021, USA.
- Selo Distinção Excelência em Literatura Infantil e Juvenil, UNESCO Reading Chair, 2021, Brazil.
- Special Mention, Premio Nati per Leggere, 2019, Italy.

“It tells the story of the journey by ship of hundreds of children from Spanish exile to Mexico, the children of Morelia. It does so without concessions but with beauty”. Babelia, Spain.

“Mexico during the Spanish Civil War, is a potent reminder of an echoing historical crisis”. Foreword Reviews, USA.

“*Mexique* and the other two picturebooks, to varying degrees, not only distance themselves from that ‘unthinking idealization’ which, according to Hirsch and Spitzer, simplifies and romanticizes the past, but also function as a ‘creative inspiration... a call to fill what is missing in the present’; that is, they serve as a reminder that these separations and traumas are still happening to millions of children in current conflict situations. The postmemorial structures, built through visual and verbal metaphors, aesthetic characteristics, historical and transcultural markers, emotional turning points, framed silences, and distancing devices, position readers in such a way that they can glimpse what this experience might be like; at the same time, they expose the contradictions in adults’ attitudes towards children, attitudes that mourn the loss of childhood but are often its cause”. Those Who Come Back and Those Who Don’t: Postmemory and Provocation in Picturebooks About Evacuated Children, by Evelyn Arizpe. Published in LIJ Ibero: Journal of Contemporary Children’s and Young Adult Literature, Vol. 17, No. 9, 2024, pp. 36–53.





Cuando fuiste nube (When You Were Cloud)

Illus. by Azul López, Fondo de Cultura Económica, México, 2019.

The poetic voice takes a child by the hand through fantastic paths to face an important loss for him; we encounter astronauts and horses, monsters under the bed, and moving mountains—everything oscillates between the dreamlike and the real. At the same time, these poems offer a rediscovery of things, as each cleverly crafted verse weaves a new perspective, a more innocent one, leading to a different and profound view of the everyday. This work creates a true poetic delight through its eloquence, creativity, and philosophical depth.

(Presentation by Fondo de Cultura Económica Publishing.)

Translations

· German, Hagebutte Verlag, 2023.

Awards

· Bavarian Free State Publishing Award, 2023, Germany.

· Hispano-American Poetry Award for Children, 2018, Mexico.

“Playful and at the same time poetic, each poem guides (not only) children to discover the magic of words and how they can inspire imagination and connect us with other living beings. Words are the key to the world! (...) A magical contribution not only to promote reading but also to foster creativity”. Jury, Bavarian Free State Publishing Award 2023, Germany.

“In the poetic reflections, the reality of everyday life is embraced and infused with magic and fantasy. From the very first pages, the author enters into a dialogue with the reader. Her poetry creates fantastic images (joyful, humorous, reflective) and offers space for interpretation. His creative ideas awaken thoughts and memories. They make you smile, make you laugh, reveal hidden possibilities, and question the order of things”. Johanna Klute, Lateinamerika Archiv, Germany.



El bolso (The Purse)

Illus. by Ana Palmero, Alboroto, México, 2021.

Keys, handkerchiefs, coins, three flowers from last spring, a bird. Boys and girls are expert observers and that is why they know into a mother's purse fits everything. A book in Braille that reminds its readers that when observations are mixed with imagination, the most everyday objects can come to poetic life.

(Presentation by Alboroto Publishing.)

Awards

- Bologna Ragazzi Awards, New Horizons, 2023, Italy.
- Cuatrogatos Foundation Award, 2023, USA.
- White Ravens Selection, Internationale Jugendbibliothek of Munich, 2022, Germany.

“Read this book with your eyes closed! To discover the treasure of *The Purse* delve into this book as if you were reaching into a bag to uncover what's inside. The basic concept is the accessible notion of going through a bag without looking. The joy of this book is an invitation for visually able and visually impaired readers to read together. The lyrical rhythm of the language corresponds to the touchable images, and the reduced text, simple graphics, tactile images and braille transform a humble format into a charming product that rejoices in the everyday. The inclusion of the Braille alphabet inspires everyone to read this book through the medium of touch, and this simple act makes it particularly special”. Special Jury Prize. Bologna Children's Book Fair. New Horizons Bologna Ragazzi Award 2023.



8. Reviews of Books Submitted to the Jury



LA STAMPA

Chilean children dreamed of collecting rain to make a sea in the yard

By Nadia Terranova (about *Niños*)
December 18, 2021 (Italy)

Alicia thinks that even balloons should have a birthday. Sergio decides to plant a pot of words in spring. Magla studies the sound of soap bubbles. Who knows if Marco and Soledad will ever meet: she loves the symphony of the rain, he wants to collect its drops to make a sea in the yard. The same goes for Susana, who marvels at the lights outside the window, mistaking them for little sunsets, and Felipe, for whom the sun is the lightbulb in his room.

These are some of the thirty-four Chilean children who disappeared or were killed during Pinochet's regime. During the seventeen years of dictatorship, 1,102 people went missing, and when added to the 2,095 who were murdered, we get a total of 3,197 victims. After 1990, Chile turned the page, and many chose to forget or suppress the extermination and the disappeared. Many, but not all: María José Ferrada is among those who value memory and believe that writing can and should keep the light on past tragedies and the light of hope.

She does not forget the black hole of the military dictatorship and creates for them a delicate and moving book, *Niños*, illustrated by María Elena Valdez and published by Edicola in Giulia Giorgini's translation (78 pages, €18): a collection of portraits that restores voice, face, body, but above all dreams to the thirty-four children whose childhoods were stolen from them, so that they are not just names or numbers, so that we too, by reading, can see what the world was like through their eyes and what it should always be like.

We can question Elizabeth's stuffed animals while playing teacher with her, let Mercedes tell us that the moon is a giant cheese, or flip through the dictionary José has invented: all this through luminous and moving pages, suspended between the horror of history and the sweetness of dreams.

María José Ferrada, whose book earned her a mention in the Bologna Ragazzi Award, proves to be a talented author with powerful writing. Her words are magical, and the harmony with which she composes the page is imbued with a gentle yet relentless rhythm. The children's eyes, their dearest objects, and their visions are brought back to life through the delicate illustrations of María Elena Valdez, soft in color and precise in their restorative mission.

The final portrait is of Pablo, who was found in 2000 after an odyssey: taken from his parents, still students, he was handed over by the military for illegal adoption. As for the fate of all the others who disappeared or were murdered, the last pages contain a list carefully reconstructed by the author, thanks in part to Victoria Baeza, a human rights advocate.

We cannot erase history, but we can keep what has happened as a reminder, a wake-up call. Every time we forget or underestimate how political violence impacts childhood, this is what this book seems to say. It hurts deeply, but it is necessary: don't miss it.

<https://www.edicolaed.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/TTL-1812.pdf>



“Niños” by María José Ferrada: Remembering Childhood

By Jaime Hales (about *Niños*)
March 26, 2023 (Chile)

During the Chilean dictatorship, repression hit the population hard. Disappearances, executions, imprisonments, exiles, threats, fear. That repression included minors, though this has been less widely acknowledged. This book is a remembrance, a denunciation, and a tribute to 34 boys and girls killed or imprisoned and disappeared.

In a carefully crafted edition, the writer María José Ferrada presents us with delicate poetic prose for each child, thinking of them, revealing the effort she made to know and penetrate the essence of each one of them, of such few years or months of life, expressing in a unique way what each boy and girl was, aspired to, dreamed of, wanted, and did.

On page 28, we meet Alejandra, who was killed at the age of one month: “For the first time, she will see her arrive. Her mother lulls her to sleep with a song that tells her the flowers will come. A lullaby that says the birds will come, and the sun will be a small blanket. For the first time, the spring.”

Gabriel, killed at the age of three years, appears on page 40: “He likes to imagine that the stars are holes in the sky. That when the sun sets, the Earth is covered by a black coat. It’s so ancient that it has holes; that’s why there’s light.”

Each of these 34 texts is illustrated by Venezuelan artist María Elena Valdez, who delicately conveys not only what Ferrada writes but also what she feels about these lives cut short by institutionalized violence.

Only poetic words express, with tenderness and boldness, the pain of interrupted lives and of hopes dissolved in a spring that never came for these children. There are no opinions, no speeches. There are no condemnations: only the subtle explanation that, on one September day, just before spring, bullets rained down on those bodies that, in their final breaths, saw how a night fell upon their future and that of their fathers and mothers. And siblings. And thousands of others who, devastated and crushed by fear, preferred to remain silent witnesses to so many hard years that are still present in memory.

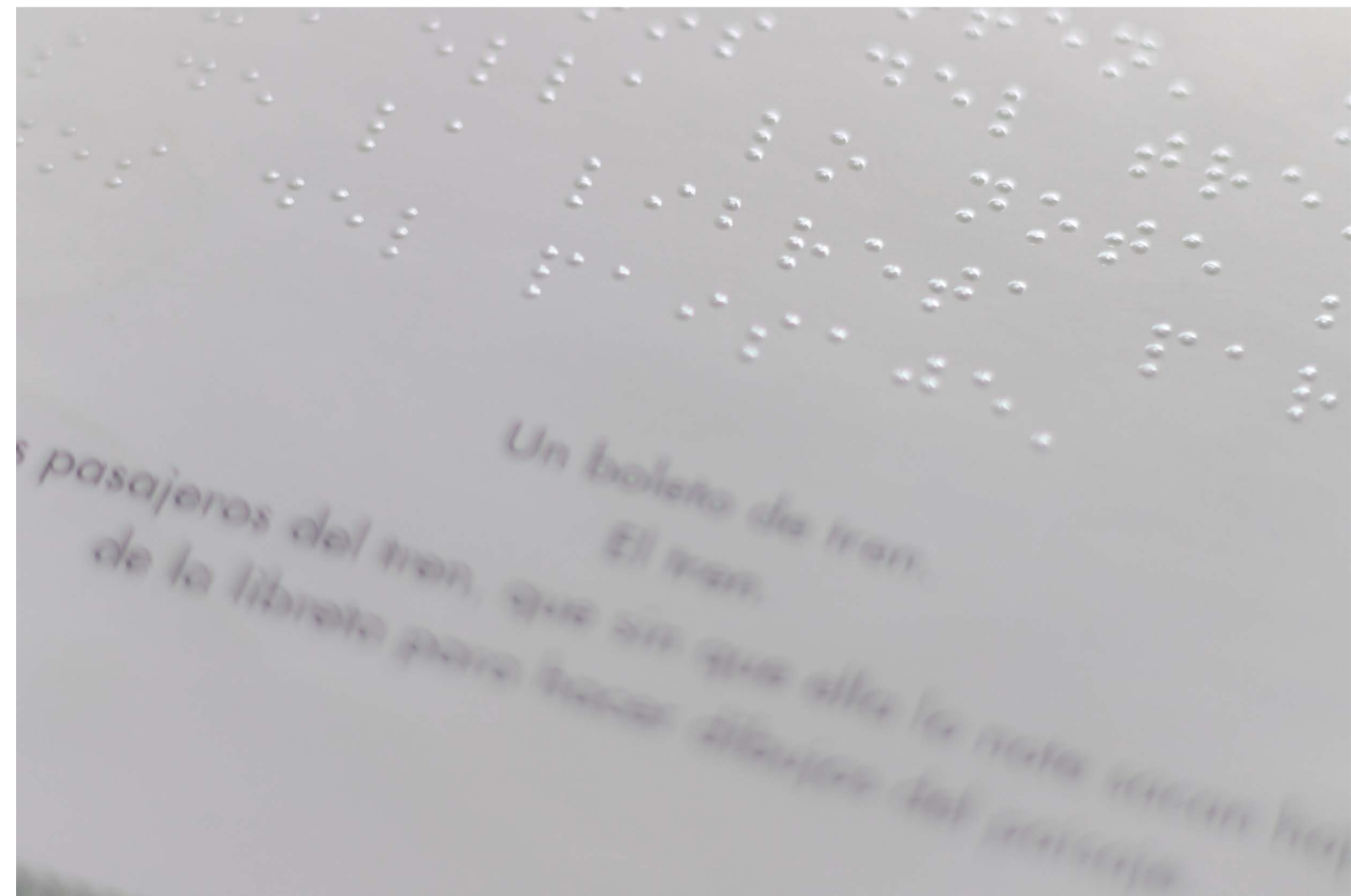
The book is moving. A brilliant idea, a monumental testimony. One to keep on the table every day so that everyone, especially other children, can learn from it. So that it will never happen again!

The White Ravens

(about *The Purse*)
October, 2021 (Germany)

In many of her books, María José Ferrada achieves an artless balance between prose and poetry. Her texts live in the natural, incidental flow of words and sentences, while artfully compacting language, giving it a lyrical, rhythmic tone. The boundary between reality and imagination dissolves, too – as happens here, with »my Mum’s« bag that »everything fits into«. This everyday object becomes a magical place that has the potential to hold everything: a cell phone and keys lie next to »three flower blossoms from last spring«, a cat the size of a coin, and a train ticket along with the train and its passengers. The inventive illustrations by Ana Palmero Cáceres are also delightful, as they gracefully play with geometric shapes and ornaments. The show-stopper in this elaborately designed and produced book is that the text (in print and Braille type) and illustrations (partly in relief) can be read and observed with both the eyes and the fingers.

https://www.ijb.de/fileadmin/Daten/Pdfs/2021/The_White_Ravens_2021_catalogue.pdf



Childish wisdom, married to adult ignorance

By Katharina Teutsch (about *Kramp*)

October 16, 2021 (Germany)

Told in an innocent and existentially demanding way: In María José Ferrada's debut, "Kramp," a daughter travels through the interior of Chile with her father.

What's in the little suitcase that the Chilean María José Ferrada gives to the hardware salesman D. to hold in his hand? "Nails, saws, hammers, door handles, and peepholes, all from the Kramp company." And since everything is from the Kramp family, a German company still active today, which made good sales in Chile in the 1980s, Ferrada's debut novel is also called "*Kramp*."

The story begins with *Kramp* screws: A certain D. starts his adventurous career as a salesman on the day of the moon landing and writes on a paper napkin: "In every life, there comes a moon landing." Just a week later, he sells "half a dozen saws and a whole dozen peepholes." These are the beginnings of a way of life that the little M. — the seven-year-old narrator, touchingly indifferent — will soon experience for herself. Her dad takes her with him on his tours through rural Chile, thus allowing her a "parallel education" kept hidden from her mother. "My mother," she says at one point, "was almost never really present, but still, we couldn't take advantage of that."

In the villages around Santiago, D. and M. quickly get to know every hardware store owner with their personal life stories and achieve good sales as a clever representative duo. Together, father and daughter can better theatricalize their performances, should the need arise: "If the salesman looked into my pupils, he wouldn't find me, but all the possible forms of fragility: the hunger of the world, the beautiful snowmen who, despite all efforts, inevitably melted into water, or the dog Laika, who endlessly spun around herself in the endless night of space."

For the reader, the parallel education project of D. marks the beginning of a road movie that is both comedic and existentially demanding. It involves a lot of screws, door spies, and saws. But also immaterial things, not immediately concretizable, that give the *Kramp* stability of the novel something unstable.

The story is told in an innocent, Cortázar-like tone. That is, a tone that combines childlike wisdom, unperturbed, with adult foolishness, thus creating memorable realities: "When I told my friends about this years

later, I tried to clarify that D. had not acted immorally — as my maternal grandmother expressed it — on the contrary, he was a pioneer of systematic pedagogy." The result is always comedic. However, this comedy is, from the start, also underscored by a subtle tragedy.

One day, D. meets a certain E., a passionate film projectionist and a photographer who goes ghost hunting with his camera. The last third of the book tells a strange incident in which E. digs in a village looking for buried dead in order to photograph their bones. Shots are fired, D. and E. are arrested and probably tortured. M. spends the night in the village square under a mulberry tree, where she is found the next morning she is found with hypothermia and revived with alcohol from the village shop.

Slowly, one begins to realize that in this seemingly cheerful father-daughter novel, there are also much deeper issues at play. The author, beneath the adventure story, is actually telling a ghost story, the roots of which can be traced to the Chilean dictatorship under Augusto Pinochet, with its thousands of victims of the regime. And in fact, M.'s mother also has a painful loss to deal with: the disappearance of her great first love.

One day, when E. arrives at D.'s house and the two men start talking about World War II, M. has a "revelation." Her first one, as she reports: "When I looked at the plate of asparagus soup in front of me, I noticed that the rising steam turned into a small ghost about the size of a thumb. A second ghost joined it, then a third, and finally a fourth. The procession of ghosts rose from the soup, moved above the table in the air, and tried to make contact with the beyond. However, it did not succeed. Poor ghosts. When I snapped out of my trance and told them about my strange vision, my mother burst into tears, whereupon E. said it was time to leave."

María José Ferrada, who had already shone as a children's author, presents in her debut an unflinchingly direct portrayal of a traumatized society, under whose care she herself grew up: as a child salesperson of a product portfolio, from which D. always said that anyone who built their house with 80% Kramp parts would be safe from destruction. The same cannot be said for the brave heroes and heroines of this small novel. In just over 130 pages, it contains everything others would stretch into 1300. Love and adventure, trauma and survival, not accusation, but acceptance.

Once again, the small Berenberg publishing house in Berlin, which had already published the Raabe Prize winner Christine Wunnicke in 2020, has released a literary gem. *Kramp* translated with fine humor by Peter Kultzen, is a book of a thousand truths. These could also be applied to the impartial soul of this remarkable first-person narrator: "In the village shops, there was no disorder, but a dynamic order. You didn't have to be a genius to grasp their true character: village shops were proto-anarchistic systems."

MEXIQUE a Refugee Story from the Spanish Civil War

By Elisa Amado (about *Mexique, the Name of the Ship*)

October 27, 2020 (USA)

On May 27, 1937, 456 children were evacuated from Spain during the Spanish Civil War. This book depicts their transatlantic journey to Mexico.

Text and illustrations work hand in hand to tell their story. Adults carrying bundles and accompanying children arrive at the port where the children are to embark. As the children board, the adults hug them tightly. Through the voice of one of the children, readers learn of their fears and expectations. They see the older ones reassuring the younger ones, especially at night. They observe their songs and games, sad re-creations of the war scenes they have witnessed. They experience the journey which never seems to end. And finally the children arrive: “We move forward. We think that the war stayed behind. But it’s not true—we bring the war in our suitcases.” By focusing on the children (all depicted as white) and their feelings, the story of their journey becomes the sad, universal story of so many refugee children past and present. Sepia-toned images with the occasional touch of muted reds convey the grimness of the experience. The afterword informs readers that the children arrived in Mexico expecting their stay to be short and that they would soon be reunited with their families back home. Little did they know that this would be a permanent exile, and most of them would never see their families again.

Specific yet universal in its narrative, this book makes the refugee experience accessible to young readers. (Picture book. 6-10)

<https://www.kirkusreviews.com/book-reviews/maria-jose-ferrada/mexique/>



Without return

By Martina Russo (about *Mexique, the Name of the Ship*)

April, 2019 (Italy)

It is May 27, 1937, when 456 children, children of Spanish republicans, board the Mexique in Bordeaux, heading for Veracruz and then Morelia. Their parents have stayed in the homeland, but soon, they assure, they will join them across the ocean. A matter of months.

The journey is long and full of sadness. The children are fleeing the civil war, but the memory of what they are leaving behind visits them every night, in the nightmares that fill their sleep. They are of different ages, some are young and others are older, who immediately become older brothers and sisters. The arrival is almost as bewildering as the departure: after having dreamed of it so much (the sea is a place that never ends), here are the coasts of Mexico, here are the white handkerchiefs waved by those who have come to greet them. The war seems to be over, but the landing is not synonymous with serenity, as these 456 children are forced into exile: World War II has broken out in Europe, and their parents, contrary to the plans, can no longer reach them. Mexico will take care of their reception until 1948; after that, the children will be abandoned to their own fate, unable to return home and forced to build a new life on their own.

A story, that of “the children of Morelia,” very little known and for that reason even more heartbreaking: it is told by María José Ferrada, a Chilean author - featured in the Topipittori catalog with *Il segreto delle cose* and in the Edicola Ediciones catalog with *Kramp* - capable of balancing delicacy and expressive power in an enveloping lyric, striking in the synthesis of syncopated phrases, almost like a song imbued with melancholy, yet determined to be remembered.

And this story is also told through the American-style shots and the frames - almost like comic strips - by the Spanish illustrator Ana Penyas, who plays with a scale of grays interrupted only by the soft pink of the clothing and familiar faces. A mixed technique, combining Penyas’ style - which alternates between fine and bold strokes, with sometimes grotesque faces, and a preference for depicting small crowds - with the reworking of the original photographs that have been preserved.

A precious book, important not only because it opens the door to discovering a lesser-known piece of history, but because it tells a story that is not so distant from the many stories of landings we hear every day. On the other hand, as stated in the final pages: “This book is dedicated to all those who had to leave their homes destroyed by war, and to the hope that drives them: that, once they disembark from the ship, destiny will give them a dignified life, like the one every human being should have.”

<https://edizioniclichy.it/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/AndersenMexique03-04.pdf>

When you were cloud

(about *When you were cloud*)

Leseempfehlungen 2024/2025 (Germany)

Maria José Ferrada's poems draw attention to the unnoticed things. They show how materiality and language, but also the imagination of children, create our world. Only they see the little horse that walks around the table for real, and they can call it to them. In text and image, the boundaries between fantasy and reality, light and dark, human and nature dissolve playfully. Infinity becomes tangible when the stars fall into our hands and "snuggle" together. The world is re-scaled, its connections explored, and illuminated in an unfamiliar and enriching light: trees invent words and do not fall silent when they continue to live as furniture in our living rooms – and we learn to listen to them.

The texts also approach things beyond reality with remarkable impartiality: neither the monster under the bed nor the ghost in the pocket cause fear, but are instead invited to engage in friendly dialog. The playful shifts in perspective by the Chilean writer encourage an open view of the world. The colorful, detailed chalk illustrations adorn one, sometimes two pages, inviting us to imagine what it was like when we were still "clouds."

<https://hagebutte-verlag.de/zwischen-fantasie-und-wirklichkeit/>



When you were cloud

By Florencia Lamas (about *When you were cloud*)

September 30, 2020 (Spain)

In these verses from the poem that opens *When you were cloud* by Chilean writer María José Ferrada, one of the entry points to reading the collection could be condensed.

In previous books —such as *El lenguaje de las cosas*, *Escondido*, or *El baile diminuto*— Ferrada's poems evoke the contemplation of the small from a voice that pauses to observe the world with a playful and amazed attitude. In constructing that gaze, the poetic voice seeks to approach a way of perceiving that the author recognizes in childhood, as she has noted in several interviews: a way of observing with wonder, as if seeing things for the first time.

In *When you were cloud*, that gaze is also present, but the poetic voice takes one step further: it invites us to name, to put words together to create "a new language." A language that is valued to the point of being considered a gift:

*The astronauts
go out into the parks
when the moon appears in the sky. (...)*

*The last one I saw
told me that the moon was quiet
like a silent film,
that it was impossible to describe such a silence.*

*I was left thinking
that perhaps you might be able to think of
a new word for that,*

*a new language
to give to the astronauts as a gift (...)*

The attentive gaze and the emphasis on speaking and conversation run through many of the sixteen poems that make up this work, and the possibility of acquiring another language that allows one to name the world in a new way is associated with childhood:

*It was in Grandma's time
or before.*

Children learned the language of the owls.

A few years ago, the specialist in children's literature Cecilia Bajour asked: "Where do the poems for children written these days in our languages speak from? From whom do they speak? What ideas of children, adults, and the relationship between them seem to lie behind these positions of the subject who engages with the object or objects spoken by the poem?" Reading this collection, we could answer that the image of children that Ferrada constructs is one in which they hold power over language and are attributed a gaze that we can define as poetic in the sense proposed by Argentine writer Alicia Genovese: "poetry resists the flattening of perception, the routine of seeing the same thing, and proposes new approaches, new versions of the real." But moreover, we could respond that the poetic voice that speaks and invites its child interlocutor to take ownership of a language in order to create something new seems to be that of an adult who has caught the childlike gaze we described earlier; an adult voice that allows itself to disbelieve other adult voices, and in complicity with its child interlocutor, enters a playful dimension where the boundaries between the real and the imaginary blur.

IV
(...)

Don't think that it is a giant.

*People invent things
(giants don't exist)
just keep your attention fixed
and ask the heavens
to give you a bit of luck.*

*Enough to be
one of the fortunate few
who on an ordinary day, looking out the window,
see how a mountain
wakes up from its nap*

and gets up.

As noted in the previously cited fragments, the poems in *When you were cloud*, written in free verse, explore various rhythmic configurations, with a focus on the search for a musicality that each poem demands. It is worth pausing to consider how the alternation of lines with different lengths and stanzaic organizations —along with the silences generated— highlights, in many of the poems, certain elements that make up the landscape and the everyday, bringing attention back to the objects that Ferrada finds so interesting ("between the bread / the honey / the coffeepot"; "snow / trees / birds," among other examples).

The illustrations by Andrés López also rely on play and silences in the blank elements he has included on his pages.

A winner of the 2018 edition of the Hispano-American Poetry Prize for Children —organized by the Foundation for Mexican Letters and the Fondo de Cultura Económica— *When you were cloud* seeks readers eager to respond to the invitation of the poem that closes the book:

*Now move
to the window*

and observe (...)

<https://revistababar.com/wp/cuando-fuiste-nube/>



The New York Times

Order and Chaos, Mostly Chaos, in 3 Debut Novels

By Ginny Hogan (about *Kramp*)
January 29, 2021 (USA)

“Is it good to know the inner workings of things? To know what makes them tick?” It’s a question M — a very organized 7-year-old girl - poses to the reader late in Ferrada’s exceptional novel. M’s systematic attempts to make meaning out of her chaotic life may be futile, but they offer a canny insight into her magical mind.

In *How to Order the Universe* M - narrating the story from the future - accompanies her father on his trips to sell hardware in Pinochet-era Chile, delighting in the strange wonder of the new towns she visits. She worships a deity she calls the “Great Carpenter,” who guides the entire universe using sales principles: “The orders were never exact,” M explains; “imprecision... was one of the first laws of sales, and of life.” If M’s “parallel education” is the lessons she learns while skipping school to work for her dad, then the reader falls into a parallel universe along with her.

M doesn’t arrange her world like a toolbox for fun - she does so out of necessity, in an attempt to make sense of her strange childhood. Ferrada - a prizewinning Chilean children’s book author — cleverly pulls back the curtain back at just the right moments to offer a more objective view of M’s young life, to trace the story of her disenchantment. M idolizes her father, whose actions suggest there’s more to him than can be contained inside such a neat little box. In elegant and simple prose, ably translated from the Spanish by Bryer, the author disperses clues to explain what M cannot, such as the cause of her mother’s sadness. M’s logical thinking reflects the human instinct to create order out of chaos, but her coming-of-age is realized only once she begins to grasp her messy reality, the tragedies of her childhood, the consequences of her parents’ choices.

Transience pervades this slim novel: in the father’s itinerant career, in the speed with which new information undermines M’s prior conception of life. And the book is itself transient. Ferrada turns the story on its head several times with just one sentence. You’ll find yourself at the end before you know it, still wondering if M finally has found the order she craved.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/29/books/review/detransition-baby-torrey-peters.html>

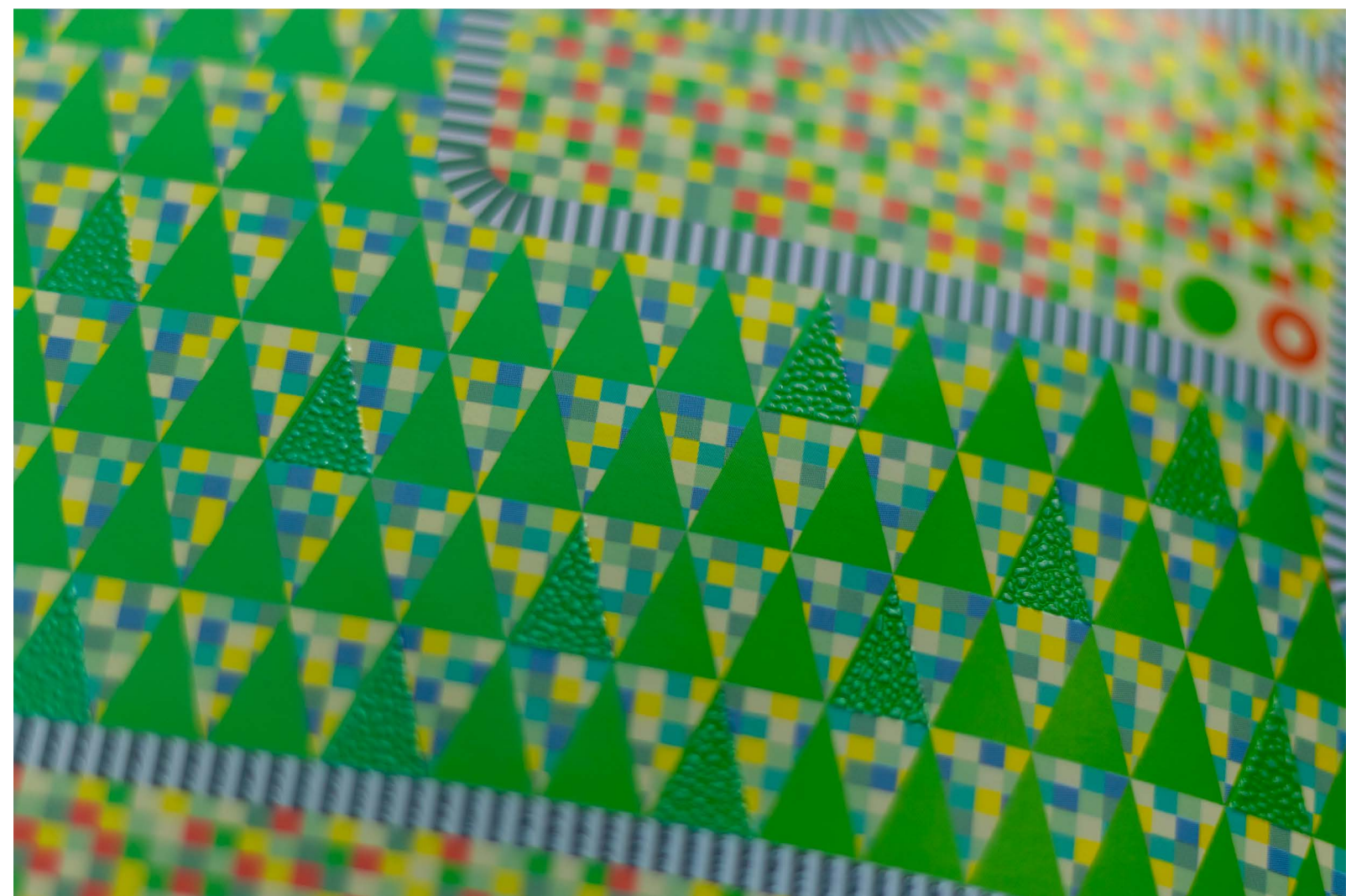


Jury of the Fundacion Cuatrogatos Award

(about *The Purse*)
January, 2022 (USA)

Mom’s handbag can be a marvelous Ali Baba’s cave in which it is possible to find not only the usual objects - keys, wallet, phone - but also cats, birds, clouds, flowers from last spring, a train with its passengers and all the treasures that populate the imagination of children and poets. The smooth and synthetic prose, with multiple suggestions and associations, is accompanied by images, colors, shapes and reliefs that reveal other possibilities of plastic representation. Charming book with ink and braille editions that invites to a visual and tactile reading.

<https://cuatrogatos.org/premios/premio/es/33>





9. Books for All

u e i o a

Convinced that literature should be accessible to all children, María José Ferrada dedicates part of her time to researching access to literature for children with different diagnoses.

In 2017 the author, in collaboration with the Japanese publisher Kaiseisha, published a pictogram version of *The Day of Manuel* (Illus. by Pato Mena, Alfaguara, 2014), a book that tells the story of a child with autism, followed in January 2020 by its sequel, *Ippon no Sento Manuel Pic Nic no Hi* (*The Line of Manuel: A Picnic Day*). Continuing her focus on inclusive literary creation, she also authored *Animal* (Illus. by Ana Palmero y Mónica Bergna, Alboroto, 2018), a braille book celebrated for its innovative and accessible approach, which was recognized as one of the ‘100 Outstanding Picture Books from Around the World’ at the 2019 Frankfurt Book Fair and included in the 2024 exhibition *Wo die wilden Striche wohnen* at the Pinacoteca Moderna in Munich. Additionally, her braille book *The Purse* won the Bologna Ragazzi Award, New Horizons (2023). Among his inclusive books is also *Secret Animals* (Illus. by Mariana Alcántara, Alboroto, 2023), a riddle book that teaches Mexican sign language to name animals.

Currently, María José Ferrada continues her inclusive work through pictopoem workshops at Fundación Bayos, located in southern Chile, where they support both children and their families, providing a developmental space connected to nature. The pictopoem workshops aim to promote creativity, inclusion, and access to literature in a participatory and accessible way.

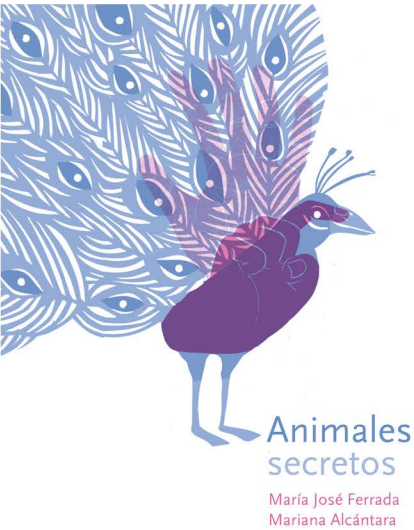
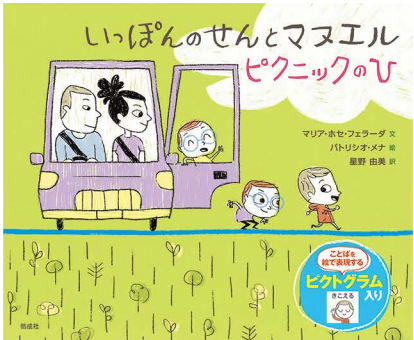


Photo: María José Ferrada



10. Literature as a Tool for Transformation

Convinced that literature is a way to observe our world with affection, María José Ferrada invites children to create poetry through workshops she conducts in schools from different parts of the world. In these spaces, children are encouraged to write poetry, promoting the value of self-expression through words and the connection that, through them, we can establish with everything around us.

Her work in the Araucanía region, one of the most rural areas in Chile and her birthplace, has stood out for the author's interest in bringing creative writing and reading to children of different ages living in remote areas. Convinced that quality literature should have a place in children's education, in addition to her work in schools, she has actively participated in public literacy policies. Through Focus and Foundation, she collaborates with LEC para Aprender (LEC to Learn), a program by the Government of Chile to strengthen reading and writing skills in primary schools. In this context, she created *Mantel de palabras* (*Tablecloth of Words*), an educational resource that, for free, in 2024 reached over 279,000 children from 2nd to 4th grade in 4,242 municipal and Public Education Service schools across the country, inviting families to share stories of their own creation.

Beyond her contributions to local education, María José Ferrada's work in literature as a tool for cohesion and community development has received international recognition. An example therefore was her collaboration in 2022 with the Government of Mexico, which invited the author to develop a poetry collection for the interactive exhibition *Toc toc mi corazón* (*Knock Knock My Heart*). The exhibition, organized by the Mexican Ministry of Culture as part of the Alas y Raíces program, was inaugurated in October 2022 at the Vasconcelos Library and later traveled to various cities across the country. Its goal was for poetry to accompany children in their joy of being reunited with their friends and loved ones after the pandemic. The exhibition was illustrated by renowned artists from Argentina, Chile, Japan, and Mexico, and was translated into 11 indigenous languages, such as Nahuatl, Zapotec, and Mixtec, as well as being available in braille.

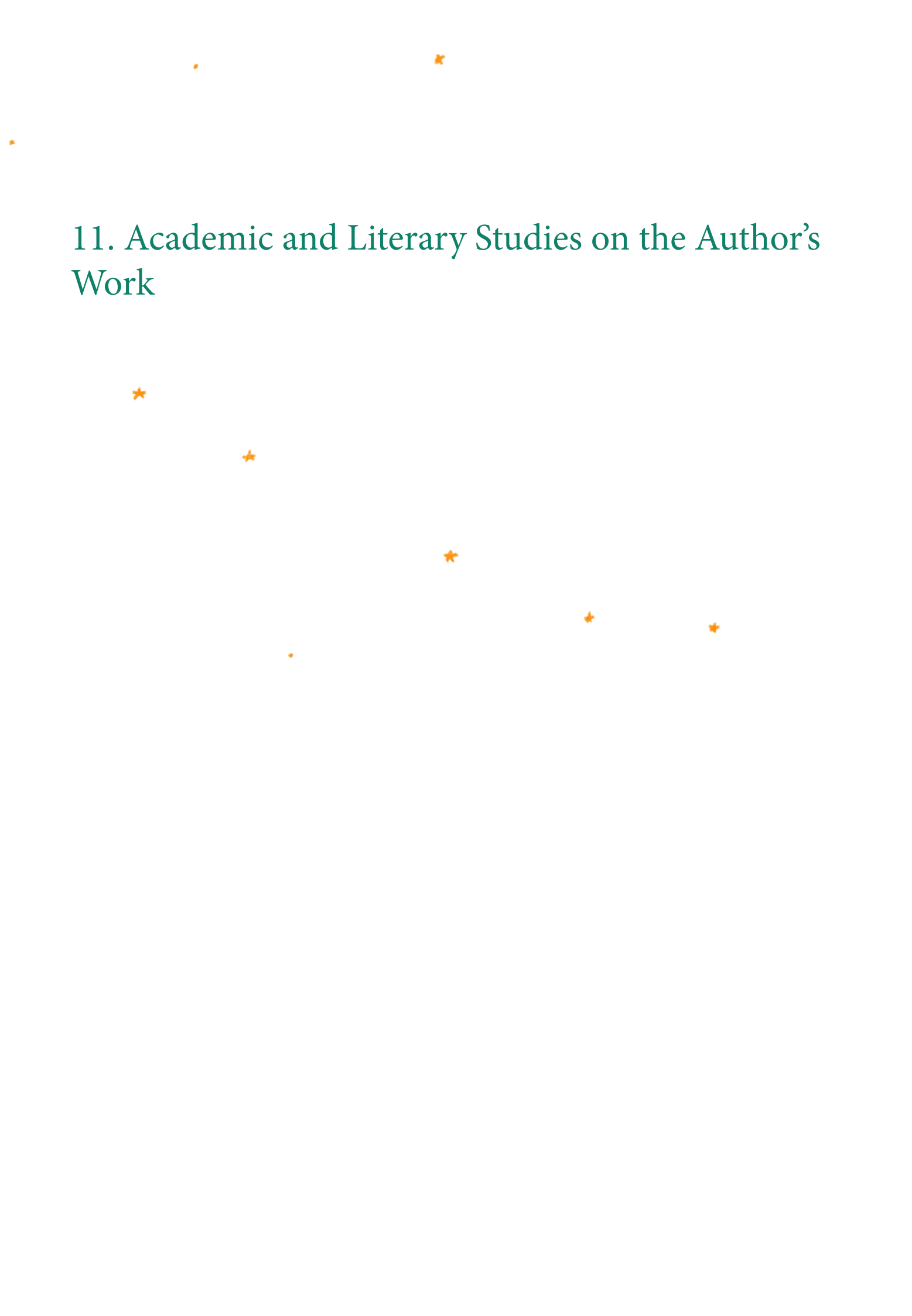
Link to news about *Mantel de palabras*:

<https://www.mineduc.cl/mineduc-presenta-mantel-de-palabras/>





11. Academic and Literary Studies on the Author's Work



The work of María José Ferrada has been the subject of interest in academic studies that address various aspects of her work, ranging from the purely literary to the possibilities of establishing connections between literature, education, inclusion, and memory. Her exploration of childhood as the root of what it means to be human has generated interest in research that ranges from academic publications to theses at universities in different countries. Below are some representative works of the studies inspired by her work:

1. Aesthetics and Fictional Voice in the Works of María José Ferrada

Suppa, S. (2020). Aesthetics and fictional voice in the works of María José Ferrada. Breaking down barriers in children's literature. Catalejos. Journal on reading, literacy, and literature.

<https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=9622732>

2. Poetry in Secondary Education

Montserrat Longares Abaiz. María José Ferrada's Poetry in Secondary Education: A proposal for literary education with young people with hearing disabilities. Faculty of Education, University of Zaragoza (2020).

<https://zaguan.unizar.es/record/98623/files/TAZ-TFM-2020-531.pdf?version=1>

3. Representation of Childhood During the Dictatorship

Bascuñán, K. (2019). Niñxs: A daily imaginary of a girl in dictatorship. Social Identities, 25(4), 607-624. Journal for the Study of Race, Nation and Culture. Volume 25, 2019 - Issue 4: War and Visual Technologies.

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13504630.2018.1514144>

4. Invoking the little god of dispossession: Chilean dictatorship and political poetics in María José Ferrada

Guerrero, L. M. R. (Pensamiento al margen: digital journal on political ideas, 17, 155-171. University of Murcia 2022).

<https://portalinvestigacion.um.es/documentos/63f8144b097d15135ce844dd>

5. Disruptive Maternities in Ferrada's Narrative

Gatti Riccardi, G. (2022). ¿Mater semper certa est? Examples of disruptive maternities, omissions, and domains in the narrative of Fernanda Trias, Giovanna Rivero, and María José Ferrada. Cuadernos del CILHA, 23(2), 9-33.

https://www.scielo.org.ar/scielo.php?pid=S1852-96152022000200009&script=sci_abstract&tling=en

6. Reader Mediation and the Construction of the Migrant Image in *Otro país*

Herrada Navarro, K., Martínez Marconi, C., Ramírez Becerra, J., & Vargas Saavedra, V. (2017). Reader mediation: construction of the migrant image in the book “*Otro país*” by María José Ferrada. Thesis for the degree of Pedagogy in General Basic Education. Universidad Católica del Maule, Faculty of Education.

<https://repositorio.ucm.cl/handle/ucm/2146>

7. María José Ferrada's Poetry in the Classroom

Martínez-Carratalá, F. A., & Miras, S. (2023). Expanding the reading experience through design in the poetry of María José Ferrada. Catalejos. Journal on reading, literacy, and children's literature, 17(9), 27-53.

<https://observatorio-cientifico.ua.es/documentos/674e064c6c3cfc1a312eeaa9>

8. The Role of Children's Literature as an Educational Tool

Farias, F. R., & Abritta, S. P. (2023). Incomodo e formação na literatura infantil: Uma leitura de *Crianças*, by María José Ferrada and María Elena Valdez. Revista Leia Escola, 23(3), 117-130.

<https://revistas.editora.ufcg.edu.br/index.php/leia/article/view/1333>

9. Literary Analysis and Translation of Ferrada's Works

Niccolai, F. (2020). Un viaggio alla scoperta del mondo della poesia per bambini. *Animalario* di María José Ferrada: proposta di traduzione. Laurea, Università di Bologna.

<https://amslaurea.unibo.it/id/eprint/20864/>

10. Poetics and Translation of *El lenguaje de las cosas*

Rota, M. (2014). *El lenguaje de las cosas* by María José Ferrada: words, verses, and images. Translation proposal for a children's illustrated poetry book. Laurea, Università di Bologna.

<https://amslaurea.unibo.it/id/eprint/7113/>

11. The Insubordination of the Inanimate: A Neo-Materialist Poetics in *El lenguaje de las cosas* by María José Ferrada

Torres Miranda, M. J. (2023). The insubordination of the inanimate: a neo-materialist poetics in *El lenguaje de las cosas* by María José Ferrada. Bachelor's thesis in Linguistics and Hispanic Literature, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile.

12. The Representation of Childhood in *Kramp* and *El hombre del cartel* by María José Ferrada

Alessandri Basaure, V. (2023). Las cosas pequeñas: figuraciones de infancia en *Kramp* (2017) and *El hombre del cartel* (2021) by María José Ferrada. Master's thesis, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile.

<https://repositorio.uc.cl/handle/11534/74352>





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The photos in this portfolio were taken in southern Chile and are part of the children's poetry photobook – currently in progress – *As If It Were a Secret or a Wonder*, written by the author and illustrated by Rodrigo Marín.

Design: Rodrigo Marín