Manuela's Dream, or the Dream of Rewriting History

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Manuela's Dream is a children's picturebook written by the Ecuadorian Edna Iturralde, with illustrations by Sofia Zapata. The text was published by Manthra Publishers in 2012 and within only few months its first reprint for the National System of Libraries was a fact.

Edna Iturralde (1948) is one of Ecuador's most prolific and recognized writers. She has published over thirty texts for children and adolescents and has won several local awards. Two of her stories, “Green Was My Jungle” (2001) and “Another Day and Other Stories” (2005), were awarded the International Prize organized by the U.S. magazine *Skipping Stones*, a publication focused on cultural diversity and the environment. Limited distribution publishers have printed some of her works in English: *Give Me One More Day and Other Stories* (1997), *When the Guns Fell Silent* (2012) and *The Day of Yesterday* (2012). A number of texts by Iturralde are used in schools throughout the country, taking advantage of the themes of her works which fit in with the curricula. In an interview, she explains: "The themes I develop are historical, ethnic, ecological, social, magical, mysterious, adventurous, romantic and realistic (...). I love researching the past, so my readers can discover facts and turn them into fun adventures, mysteries, that otherwise would not reach them rather than the coldness of textbooks and treatises of archeology" (Iturralde 2010, p 121. All translations from Spanish are mine). It is understood that her criticism of school textbooks, in this context, does not address literary-historical fiction, which is not as "cold" as the textbooks that merely summarize events and offer lists of names and dates.

Manuela's Dream narrates the story of Manuela Sáenz (1797-1856), a major figure of the period of the struggle for independence of the South American colonies (1810-1833) from the Spanish Crown. For some historians, portrayals of Sáenz are controversial, partly because "there are few documents relating to her life" (Rumazo 1945, p.11). In a biography in the form of a picturebook, a work with additional aesthetic pretensions aimed at a specific group of readers, one cannot expect all historical events to be fully summarized or even mentioned. However, it is extraordinarily interesting to study the historical information *Manuela's Dream* expresses, how it is conveyed and, above all, which facts have been hidden from the young reader. This will be achieved by providing a useful socio-historical context, not only to place Manuela Sáenz, but also to show the conditions of reading and reception of the work in contemporary Ecuador. Subsequently, the theory of children's literature developed by Maria Nikolajeva in *From Mythic to Linear: Time in Children's Literature* (1991), along with another of her works written in collaboration with Carole Scott: *How Picturebooks Work* (2001) will be used to approach the text.

1. The socio-cultural situation in Ecuador. The resurgence of icons during the golden age of children's literature

For approximately the past 15 years, Ecuador's book industry has undergone a revolution within literature for children and young adults. Girándula, the Ecuadorian organization that brings together writers and illustrators of this genre, shows surprising data: the proportion of sales between children’s literature, compared with adult literature, is five to one (Bravo 2012). Meanwhile, writers and booksellers of the country do not hesitate to point out the fact that the sale of children's literature outnumbers by far that of works by Nobel Prize winners such as Mario Vargas Llosa (Varea 2012). The market has thus become attractive to writers who began their

career writing adult literature and subsequently have tried their luck in this resurgent genre.

The main reason for the financial success of those who deal with literature for children and young adults is that most of these books are sold directly to schools and colleges. The texts are used as part of the curriculum. Government policies implemented in recent years have made the market even more alluring: children and young people are required to read an average of six books during the academic year. These books, though selected by each school and their teachers, must be typecast along certain lines, regarding subject and gender, as required by the Ministry of Education.

In Ecuador, the current government has been in the hands of the leftist political movement Alianza País since 2006. Alianza País and especially the Ecuadorian President Rafael Correa, enjoy enormous popularity. The political message from the government has pointed to a drastic change in the structures of the state and in politics, heralded by the so-called "Citizens' Revolution". Alianza País has appropriated certain historical figures to identify with, for example, General Eloy Alfaro, leader of the Liberal Revolution in the late 19th century. Alianza País has sought to equate the actions of its government with the Alfarista ideal of the reformation and reconstruction of the country. In international events, a favorite figure of invocation is Simón Bolívar, the greatest hero of the independence of the Spanish colonies in America. At the same time, there are historical figures who, in public statements by the president or officials, have lost credibility in this governmental construction, including former President León Febres Cordero (1931-2008), a right-wing politician accused by a number of independent organizations of abusing human rights, but still popular in his hometown of Guayaquil, where he served two terms as mayor.

This politically based appropriation and rejection of certain historical figures has also reached children's literature. Biographical texts have been written about Simón Bolívar, Eloy Alfaro, the Indigenous painter Oswaldo Guayasamín, the poet Dolores Veintimilla de Galindo, the heroes of the Ecuadorian revolution, etc. Although the current government indirectly benefits through the publication of these texts, which fortifies its scheme of strengthening a new national identity, it is not simply propaganda. This is evident because the publishers who print and disseminate these texts are independent cultural actors: private business is not linked to the state. Precisely because of this detail, it may be assumed that governmental censorship is not involved when certain manuscripts are refused. Publishers, like any other businesses, opt for products that have a market, and today some genres are commercially more suitable than others. The same goes for the writers, who know the preferences in the market. This means that it is "cyclical" literature: it is a text that, for certain social or political conditions, are guaranteed a wide audience. The writers may or may not agree with certain political platforms. In any case, their texts cannot immediately be understood as pandering to the *establishment*.

2. Manuela Sáenz, the historical figure.

Manuela Sáenz was born in 1797. She was the daughter of a Spanish father and a Creole mother, a product of an adulterous relationship (Rumazo 20). She had a rebellious spirit, unusual for the time: "At fifteen, Manuela wore male clothing, smoked and tamed horses. She did not ride sidesaddle, like a lady, but rode bareback"

(Galeano 2002, p. 143). She attended a convent for her education, but within a few months fell in love with the military officer Fausto d'Elhuyar[1] and eloped with him. Later she returned to Quito (Rumazo 1945, p. 63-65). Afterwards, she moved to Lima, the capital of the Viceroyalty of Peru, where she married the English physician James Thorne in 1817. While in Lima, she was openly involved in pro-independence activities. When General Jose de San Martin arrived in the city in 1821, he appointed her "Gentlewoman of the Order of the Sun of Perú". Sáenz also supported the cause of Simón Bolívar, "The Liberator", to free the Viceroyalty of New Granada, which Quito was part of, and returned to her hometown the same year.

In 1822 Manuela Sáenz met Simón Bolívar and decided to leave her husband. Sáenz maintained her relationship with Bolívar until his death. Her decision to leave Thorne caused a scandal in the society of her time. This act, together with other radical decisions, has been considered as an example of a primitive feminism in America.

Sáenz accompanied Bolívar on military campaigns and during his tenure as president of Gran Colombia, a short-lived country that included the present states of Colombia, Ecuador, Venezuela and Panama. In September 1828, Sáenz helped Bolívar escape a murder plot in Bogotá. Thereafter, Manuela Sáenz was called "The Liberator of the Liberator." Amid intrigues, Bolívar left the presidency in 1830 and died a few months later of tuberculosis. Because of her potential political influence, Manuela Sáenz was expelled from Bogotá and denied entry to Quito. She settled in Peru, where she died of diphtheria in 1856. Her possessions were burned due to the fear of contagion, and some important documents disappeared in the fire.

For many years, the image of Manuela Sáenz was controversial. One reason is that Sáenz's private documents in the possession of the Irish General Daniel O'Leary,[2] a close friend of Bolívar, were not published in full:

> [O'Leary], who venerated Bolívar, had collected valuable data and documents on the wars of Independence. He wrote his memoirs in 29 volumes: 12 covered his correspondence with Bolívar, 14 documents and 2 narratives. The final volume discusses Manuela. But when the Venezuelan authorities were going to print the whole work, and read the passages detailing the love of Manuela and the Liberator, they were horrified and suppressed the volume.
> In Bogotá, a large bundle of papers entitled *Correspondencia y documentos relacionados con la señora Manuela Sáenz, que demuestran la estimación que en ella hacían varios jefes militares* (Letters and documents relating to Mrs. Manuela Sáenz, which show the affection from several military officers) mysteriously disappeared from the shelves of the National Archives. The elimination of Manuela from the life of the man she loved and from American history was almost complete (Carrión 2005, p. 250).

In recent decades there has been a tendency to reclaim the historical importance of Manuela Sáenz. Elena Poniatowska, Pablo Neruda, Jorge Enrique Adoum, Alicia

[1] Rumazo Alfozo (1945, p. 63 recalls that there is a controversy about the real name of the officer.
[2] Incorrectly, Edna Iturralde indicates in *Manuela's Dream* that the name is David, not Daniel.

Yánez Cossío, Nelson Estupiñán or Pedro Jorge Vera Bass are some of the writers who have written about her. Among recent homages, the creation of the opera *Manuela and Bolívar* (2006) stands out. The president of Ecuador, Rafael Correa, and his political ally, former Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez,[3] commented on the role of Manuela Sáenz and her legacy on different occasions.

3. *Manuela's Dream* or the rewriting of history.

Applying the typology of the Danish scholar Torben Gregersen, as implemented by Nikolajeva and Scott (2001, p. 6), *Manuela's Dream* would be a "picturebook" where both the text and the illustrations are equally important. There is no doubt that this is an illustrated story (ibid. 8). The subgenre to which Iturralde's work belongs, however, is more difficult to define.

Manuela's Dream is unpaginated. However, it may be divided into thirteen episodes, each composed of a double page with color illustrations, an explicatory text consisting of a few lines on the top left, and a little further down, across both pages, a few sentences that begin invariably with the line: 'She always dreamed of being free' and a positive description. For example, the utterance with which the first episode ends is 'She always wanted to be free and did not even use brushes; she wore her hair down and let it fly'. Each episode shows a vignette of Manuela from her early life to old age. The only variation in this pattern is found in the final vignette, which works as note from the author; the only moment where the text becomes definitely more important than the picture. In this vignette, Iturralde speaks to a reader, probably adult or, in any case, more "mature" than a juvenile reader of the biography of Manuela Sáenz.[4] Here, Iturralde comments for the first time on the dates and names of other key heroes of the revolution, as the Marshal Sucre and General San Martín.

One aspect of the life of Manuela Sáenz that has caught the attention of biographers and scholars is the portrayal of the revolutionary character of her private life. Iturralde partially accomplished this task using trivial anecdotes (Manuela's hair is free as the wind; she does not accept the rules of the convent school, etc.). However, the anecdote in which she ran away from the convent with the officer d'Elhuyar was eliminated. And, more importantly, her decision to abandon her husband Thorne to live with Simón Bolívar has also been ignored. It is suitable to concentrate on the latter example. It is striking that, in her work, Iturralde avoids the topic of the heroine's infidelity. On one hand, her choice could be interpreted as the need to 'protect' the juvenile reader from an alien reality. This approach, however, has serious weaknesses. It is unlikely that the ideas of separation and divorce are unknown phenomena for children or that they cannot be properly understood by them. Moreover, Iturralde seems to lose a unique opportunity to reinforce her characterization of Manuela when the story does not highlight as the victory of love over social obstacles and portray a woman making her own decisions, free in every sense of the word.

However, it is also likely that Iturralde did not include this story for two reasons: to avoid unnecessary conflict with the Catholic view of readers and mediators (teachers

[3] Hugo Chávez repeatedly mentioned Bolívar and the image of the War of Independence in his political discourse. In July 2010, along with President Correa, he deposited the remains of Manuela Sáenz symbolically in the Pantheon in Caracas.

[4] Even though it is not specified in any paratextual notes, it is evident that *Manuela's Dream* is adressed to children between 6 and 8 years of age.

and parents)[5] and to protect the universe created by her story: a very peculiar kind of Arcadia. In this connection, Nikolajeva (1991) mentions that circular time in narratives is linked to Arcadia, which is the place of an idyllic utopia, where there is neither sickness, nor old age, nor death; in short, a place in which problems have solutions and where good prevails over evil. However, this juvenile Arcadia created by Iturralde and corroborated by Sofia Zapata, the illustrator, has peculiarities: the penultimate vignette mentions the death of Simón Bolívar, the aging of Manuela Sáenz, her exile and sadness. The last vignette, however, seems to restore balance to the universe: throughout her life, Manuela has been successful in gaining her freedom. And in the illustration, next to a giant bird, in absolute peace -even with a certain joy, it seems- a graying Manuela seems to be both dreaming and dying. The bird seems to be rising with her to the skies, which indirectly refers to the tradition of The Dormition of the Theotokos. According to this belief, the Virgin Mary's body and soul were lifted up into Heaven. Certainly, it is an illustration of the victory over death. In this specific drawing, Manuela has gray hair, but her face does not look wrinkled: it has even kept her childhood freckles; she is, then, a timeless character. The message seems to be that, even though she is dead, Manuela is still with us: a figure like her certainly cannot disappear.

Zapata's work is more than overwhelming from an aesthetic point of view. And if we focus on the ideological perspective, some comments are appropriate. Firstly, her choice of colors is not coincidental. For Manuela's clothes, red is preferred, identifying her primarily with passion and blood. The background of her illustrations alternate in green (when nature is essential in the drawing) and blue and red; both, curiously, the uniform colors of the Liberation Army. As if they were part of the scenery, dispersed among the characters are certain objects related to air: birds, kites, butterflies, leaves that are left shaken by the wind, wings, etc. Throughout the work, Manuela's face is clearly the only one with distinguished features. Bolívar's features can be easily confused with those of the other soldiers, or the face of her two friends (former slaves), Nathan and Jonathan, are exchanged (with a slight difference in hair length). Zapata then highlights the figure of Manuela to emphasize her both physically -to the detriment even of Bolívar, the great hero of independence - and metaphorically, adding elements associated with the popular idea that Manuela was 'free as a bird'. As noted, these graphic elements have a tendency to "expand" or "enhance" the textual meaning. However, the written message of the text is basically the same as that of the images. Normally, Manuela is very active: playing with wooden swords, as on the book's cover, or wielding true swords (at least three times) with determination and bravery. Men and women are watching her with respect and admiration. Although we speak of struggles and intrigue, death and old age, the general impression is that Arcadia cannot be broken and that Manuela, in some way or another, will definitively remain with us. Zapata's illustrations reveal a smiling Manuela at all times; even when attacking her enemies in vignette six: her face reveals a smile of confidence and superiority. Nothing can break her spirit, neither danger, nor the long journeys (vignette 7), or the prospect of battle (vignette 8). The penultimate vignette, which speaks of the death of Bolívar and the sadness of exile, never shows Manuela's face: she and her friends, all grizzled, gaze at the sea in a nostalgic picture, which is neither tragic or dramatic. That the face of the protagonist

[5] According to statistics of 2008,Catholicism is the predominant religion in Ecuador with 87,5% followers (Seligson et al. 2008)

is hidden when the story becomes less cheerful in this children's biography, is no accident. The sadness of the vignette is offset in the final vignette: Manuela, in a total state of peace, takes to the skies or dreams (the ambiguity is relevant) while the textual description recalls that the principle of freedom constantly ruled her existence.

The possible influence of religion in the conception of this work has previously been mentioned. The Catholic Church is present in *Manuela's Dream*: the second vignette shows the girl's rebellion confronting a nun who tries to educate her (metaphorically, the nun has a comb in her hand, as if to "tame" the girl's unruly hair). However, the illustration is formed in such a manner that the nun causes sympathy in the reader. Furthermore, the text also mentions her as a collective character 'las monjitas' (the nuns). The diminutive, in Spanish, does not indicate the size of women in this case, but the sympathy they invoke in the speaker.[6]

As a whole, in both the illustration and the text, there is an attempt to show a partial critique of male chauvinism. This criticism, however, does not necessarily problematize the controversial notion of marianismo. Liv Eide in "Las mujeres en la sociedad latinoamericana" (Women in Latin-American Society) describes a panoramic overview of the characteristics of the two mentalities linked to the role of women in Latin America: machismo and marianismo. Machismo comprises "the expression of a patriarchal society, where the man is the undisputed master of the house, the dominant figure and the only participant in public life. Men are privileged beings, both in society and in the family" (Eide 2006, p.142). The reading of *Manuela's Dream* shows us a world radically different from the 'realm of males': not only that no rule applies to Manuela and no one dominates her, but also that not even Simón Bolívar himself seems to be her equal: in the sixth vignette, a frightened Liberator flees through a window while Manuela defends him, sword in hand, from his enemies. The fact refers to the attempted ambush on the Liberator in Bogotá in 1828. Manuela Sáenz, then, takes an active role both privately and the publicly, and Iturralde emphasizes her duties as a soldier, colonel of the liberation army and her unqualified support of the project of Gran Colombia. The narrative shows a view free from any sexist biases.

However, the concept of marianismo seems present in the voluntary misreading of Manuela's marriage with Dr. James Thorne. Eide says: "Marianismo, however, governs the conduct of women. The ideal woman is the Virgin Mary, morally superior to man for her humility and sacrifice. This ideal of the 'pure' woman has its roots in Arab culture, which assigned woman the task of staying at home " (ibid). It is true that the last part of the quotation suggests that domestic chores are specific to women, an inconsistent example in *Manuela's Dream*. The absence of such chores reinforces Sáenz' figure as prototypical anti-machismo, an emerging feminist of her day, one might say. However, marianismo demands of women not only sexual purity, but also loyalty (a requirement that, due to sexist thinking, does not apply to men). Actually, Iturralde seems interested in portraying the traits of modesty and fidelity in Manuela Sáenz, although they do not correspond to historical reality. First, the text fails to mention that Sáenz was an illegitimate child. Neither does recall it her flight from the convent with the officer d'Elhuyar, a decision which seriously questions her chastity.

[6] Galeano (2002), as well as Rumazo (1945) and Carrión (2005) point out the double moral, especially regarding issues such as chastity, of the religious of the time of Manuela Sáenz.

And the absolute loyalty of a woman to her partner does not exist in Manuela Sáenz if we remember that she left her husband for Bolívar. The book aims to preserve the image of Manuela's "perfection" by implying that Bolívar was her first love.

Manuela' existence in harmony with nature is a leitmotif in the illustrations of the work: she is portrayed climbing a tree; in another drawing, fighting in the Viceroyalty of Peru dressed in uniform -like a girl playing at war- surrounded by ruins and nature. The seventh vignette, which is about her travels, highlights a rustic background, but, above all, in the tenth illustration, Manuela Sáenz hugs a spectacled bear. The story is based, as Iturralde mentions at the end of the book, on a true incident: Sáenz had one of these animals as a pet. Manuela's embrace of the bear is like a fairytale illustration. In fact, Nikolajeva (1991, p. 18) points out that a feature of Arcadia is its close relationship with the countryside: permanent harmony between man and nature. Iturralde (2012) says of Manuela that she "loved the innocence of animals, including cats, dogs and horses." It is difficult to find a more pastoral description anywhere else in the text.

Sofia Zapata's illustrations consolidate Iturralde's textual language. In general, Iturralde's text and Zapata's images correspond. The book is, above all, a symmetrical picturebook: both the written text and the images produce redundancy (Nikolajeva and Scott 2001, p. 12) although there is, as we have seen in some elements (kites, wings, etc..), a tendency to become an "expanding" or "enhancing" picture book. However, there is a part of the work which, apparently, could have a dual audience: the penultimate vignette. Dual audience implies that "picturebooks are clearly designed for both small children and sophisticated adults" (ibid., 21). In this specific episode, children may believe that Manuela is sleeping while adults would read the image as the death of the protagonist. Similarly, children would not be aware of the religious allusions of the drawing, while some adults would link it with the story of the Virgin Mary. Unlike the rest of the book, this episode produces what Scott and Nikolajeva describe as "many possible interpretations and involves the reader´s imagination" (2001, p. 24), which results in a kind of counterpoint. The framework proposes eight different counterpoints, and the one for this episode is the counterpoint in address: "Textual and visual gaps are deliberately left to be filled differently by child and adult" (ibid.).

4. Concluding remarks

Manuela's Dream shows signs of Arcadia (paradise and circular time) in its argument, and is symmetrical as far as the message of text and the images are concerned. However, these categories are not pure, demonstrating the complexity of the text. On one hand, there are references to aging and death (which calls into question the category of time as circular) although in both cases these references are "softened" both by the textual presentation and by the iconic nature of the text. There are also signs of "expanding" or "enhancing" and even counterpoint in address, even though we are dealing with specific elements in the first case and an isolated example in the second.

It is quite unusual for a children's text to become a reference work, even though it is not primarily historical work. However, the didactic purpose of the book is evident. Iturralde's text "forgets" facts of historical importance in order to portray a perfect image of Manuela Sáenz from a moral and Catholic perspective. In an interview, the

author says: "I prefer children's literature that reaches the readers and stays with them. The work should produce a desire to continue reading (...) In addition, it should reflect life" (Iturralde 2010, p.122). Her texts allow such reflections. The image of Manuela Sáenz fits the current Ecuador, a country in which, if one wants to construct history, there is a need for heroes to cling to. She was a woman who broke the traditional macho canons and is identified as a modern heroine, is not perturbed by danger, fights for love and her country's freedom and, at the same time, is morally blameless.

A text like *Manuela's Dream* is a prototypical model of the historical children's book with a specific intention. In Ecuador, several works could be evaluated in this light, although with significant differences between them: the presentation of historical figures in children's text involves complex challenges, including intentionality. Such intent could be explained in several manners: firstly, that the author really believes in the characteristics of the historical figure he/she has recreated. Secondly, there are mere economic considerations: a text must be suitable for the current market. Third, the author may be aligned with a particular ideological position and his/her text may be useful for a political belief; or a mixture of the three. At the same time, the work could be the result of collective pressure: the socio-political conditions in a country can require this kind of heroes. Although discussing process of creation and analyzing intentionality leads into a morass of problems in literary theory, this paper has focused on other features of historical biographies for children which may be useful in future studies.

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