

LANDA, Mariasun

(Renteria, 1949)

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Mariasun Landa has published 27 books so far and, after Bernardo Atxaga, is the most widely translated Basque author. She is a Philosophy graduate from Sorbonne and currently teaches at the University of the Basque Country. She has also taught at primary schools and in Basque language academies. She has received many prizes in the Basque country, including the Lizardi prize (1982), the Euskadi prize (1991) and the Antonio María Labaien prize (2002). She has also been awarded several international prizes: the White Ravens in 2002 for *Elefante corazón de pájaro* ("The Bird-Hearted Elephant," 2001) and the 2003 Spanish Premio Nacional for children and young people's literature for *Un cocodrilo bajo la cama* ("A Crocodile Under the Bed," 2004). Throughout her literary career as a children's and young people's author she has continually explored different literary and techniques styles. For Landa, portraying intense and universal human emotions in a simple way is the greatest challenge for a writer in her field.

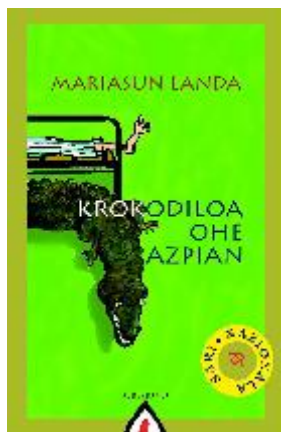
After publishing several books that were clearly influenced by Gianni Rodari's fantastic literature, the publication in 1984 of *Chan el fantasma* (*Karmentxu and the Little Ghost*), a text written in a critical-realist vein, was a turning point in Mariasun Landa's literary development. In it, a ghost called Chan tells the story of a little girl who appears to be autistic and is confined to a mental hospital - which gives an idea of the emotional

intensity of this tale. *Iholdi* is another key text in Landa's body of work. It is one of her best books, and was included in the IBBY Honour List. With it, the author matured into a more postmodern aesthetic expression. *Iholdi* is a fragmentary book, made up of sixteen micro-stories woven with surprising simplicity and exactitude and imbued with tremendous suggestive power.

Some of her other stories are: *Cuando los gatos se sienten tan solos* ("When Cats Feel Lonely," 1998) and *Nire eskua zurean* ("My Hand in Yours," 1996). These are more specifically psychological than her previous books and deal with feelings such as jealousy or abandonment, which can be common in the relationship between parents and teenage children.



One feature that stands out in many of Landa's tales is humour, especially nonsensical humour. Two good examples of this are *Galtzerdi suizida* ("The Suicidal Sock," 2001), which tells the story of an adventurous sock who wants to commit suicide, and *Errusika* (*The Dancing Flea*), published in 1993, which is the story of a flea who wants to be a ballerina.



Best among Mariasun Landa's most recent publications are *Elefante corazón de pájaro* ("The Bird-Hearted Elephant," 2001) and *Un cocodrilo bajo la cama* ("A Crocodile Under the Bed," 2003). The latter deals with themes such as solitude and anguish in an absurdist style. It relates the complicated ups and downs in JJ's life. JJ is an office clerk, a grey man leading a lonely grey life until the day he finds a shoe-eating crocodile under his bed. The tale is rich and audacious in its parody of psychiatric treatments and anti-depressants, and the comic situations the main crocodrilitic character experiences will put a smile on most readers' faces.