

2025 Jan Michalski Prize for Literature  
Laudatio for Guadalupe Nettel  
by Andrea Marcolongo, member of the Jury

Members of the Jan Michalski Foundation,  
friends of literature,  
and Guadalupe Nettel,

There are books that, quietly, upend our way of looking at life. They don't stand out from the start. They move in close. They don't look to convince but to understand. And in that gesture towards understanding, they mend something that is deeply human. The rare bird we are here to honor this evening belongs to that family of books that are discreet and necessary.

The title alone contains a complete world. *L'oiseau rare*, or "rare bird" [*Still Born* in its English translation] – *La hija única* in your original Spanish title, Guadalupe – conjures up something that escapes us, that doesn't conform. It speaks of the beauty of the singular, the resilience of the exceptional, the fragile light of what does not fit into the strict limits of the possible. This rare bird is first and foremost the child around whom your novel plays out its graceful and painful movement. But more stealthily it is also a metaphor for all existence, that obstinacy of life to continue being, even when it should no longer be able to fly.

In this heartbreakingly intense novel, we meet Laura, the sharp-eye narrator who observes the world as if examining an inner landscape. There are two other characters who gravitate around Laura, her childhood friend Alina, who learns that the baby she is carrying has an irreversible malformation; and Doris, a single mother who is trying to protect her son Nico from the violence of the city. Three women, three lonely individuals, three paths to motherhood that ultimately intersect and together create a sort of invisible community.

*L'oiseau rare* isn't a novel about motherhood. It is a novel about life in all that it contains that is naked and contradictory. In it you describe motherhood as a radically human experience, both biological and symbolic. It is the experience of giving shape to what wants to die and even loving what cannot be saved. You confront the question of mourning before death, thwarted birth, and a broken promise even before it was kept.

And yet, despite the tragedy, your book is pervaded with an incredibly gentle light. You never shy away from pain but see it with a clarity that ends up disarming it. There is in your writing that calm faith that literature calls the inexpressible and can gather in what society rejects or is unable to put into words. Where others would see despair, you find a way of inhabiting loss.

Your writing, with a clarity that is almost transparent, moves forward step by step. It doesn't look to create effects but to achieve precision. Each sentence breathes as if the very breath of life were blowing between the words. In this unadorned language, everything becomes poignant, a gesture, an expectation, a phrase held back. You write the way one looks after another. With care, respect, and a sympathetic ear.

It must be said that your entire body of work from the start, *Guadalupe*, is an exploration of life in all its forms. In *The Body Where I Was Born*, you told of the discovery of oneself through difference and the fragility of the body. In *After the Winter*, you explored loneliness and the fear of attachment in a world where human connection always seems under threat. In *El matrimonio de los peces rojos* [The Goldfish Couple], you extended the scope of your vision to other species, questioning our way of coexisting with the living world. And now *Still Born*, in a way, comes to tie all that up together, namely the body, loneliness, connection, survival. Everything is in there, but softened and soothed. This novel seems to be a breath of fresh air in your journey, a reconciliation with life, not an ideal life but life as it is, imperfect and beautiful.

Through your female characters, you render a truth that few dare confront, namely the truth of women who no longer define themselves by what they own or accomplish but rather by their capacity to love, share, and resist. These women are not heroines, but guardians of tenderness in a brutal world, guardians of an attention to what remains living. In a world saturated with images and sound, you restore silence, the simple gesture, deliberate speech.

In your novel Mexico is not a setting but a living organism. It is a sprawling, noisy, imperfect city where beauty springs up where it is least expected, in a kitchen, a square, a glance that meets yours in the street. You make that city a mirror of the contemporary world, a place of contradictions and struggles, but also of ordinary miracles. And in this chaos your heroines, through solidarity and kindness, find a space for resistance.

What is impressive about you, *Guadalupe*, is the way lucidity never snuffs out hope. You see everything – death, violence, insecurity, fear – but you do not give up. You continue to believe in goodness, gentleness, the possibility of righteous acts. Your writing is indeed lucid, but it is also merciful.

This is why your work resonates well beyond Mexico. It is part of that great humanist current of world literature that rejects resignation. You extend in your way the tradition of Octavio Paz and Juan Rulfo, but adding the voice of the feminine, the intimate, the tender. You show that true modernity lies not in the cool of observed fact but in the warmth of the human gaze.

To be awarded the Jan Michalski Prize is to join a list of authors who believe that literature can still keep the world upright. It is to recognize that before the brutality of the real the only possible response is and remains language, words. And your words, *Guadalupe*, are a discreet though constant light. It shines not to dazzle but to illuminate the zones where we dare not look.

My dear *Guadalupe*, you remind us that literature is not a refuge but a place where one learns to live. You teach us that to put a name to pain is already to lend it meaning; to describe fragility is to dignify it; and to write about life is in a way to save it.

Thank you for this book, which we read not only with our eyes but also with our heart and breath. Thank you for your quiet courage, your sense of the truth, and your obstinate faith in the beauty of life.

And long may your rare bird continue to fly over our lives. Reminding us, in the beat of its wings, that each human being, even the most vulnerable, bears within the promise of an open sky.