

ANGELA ARTICONI

THE ART OF TRANSFORMING PAIN INTO ART:
FRIDA KAHLO'S WORLD

L'ARTE DI TRASFORMARE IL DOLORE IN ARTE
IL MONDO DI FRIDA KAHLO

This paper analyses the personage of Frida Kahlo who faced her own awkward position from the outset without ever surrendering to misfortune, succeeding in transforming immobility into an artistic opportunity and in transfiguring suffering into art.

Although she had been seriously injured, having survived a fatal crash compelled a rebirth from her: having to cope with her own figure in the mirror, with pain deriving from her serious health condition, she bravely decided to start anew moved by a positive feeling and by the need for beauty which she poured into her paintings and into her multiple, unconventional portraits.

And whether in order to describe afflictions there is the need for beauty, then also words play a completely privileged role, with their poetry, charm, redeeming power. Stories related to Frida – targeting children and teenagers – aim at generating a new paradigm, at quitting with the habit of reading the adventures of unreal and conventional characters, and at succeeding in creating an emphatic bond between the artist and the readers, bringing them close to a woman who is at times the estranging and melancholic interpreter of a 'fairy-tale' in which she overcomes all tribulations, almost magically, transfiguring them into energy and beauty on canvas.

Il contributo analizza la figura di Frida Kahlo che fin dagli esordi affrontò la sua difficile condizione senza arrendersi mai alla sorte avversa, riuscendo a trasformare l'immobilità in opportunità artistica e a trasfigurare la sofferenza in arte.

L'essere sfuggita alla morte in un incidente, pur se rimasta gravemente ferita, le impose una rinascita: costretta a confrontarsi con la sua immagine allo specchio, con il dolore per le sue gravi condizioni di salute, decise con coraggio di ricominciare, animata da un sentimento positivo e da un'esigenza di bellezza che riversava nei suoi dipinti e nei suoi molteplici, inusuali autoritratti.

E se per descrivere le afflizioni c'è bisogno della bellezza, allora anche la parola ha un ruolo del tutto privilegiato, con tutta la sua poeticità, il suo incanto, il suo potere salvifico. Le storie correlate a Frida – per l'infanzia e la gioventù – hanno l'obiettivo di generare un nuovo paradigma, abbandonare l'abitudine di leggere avventure di personaggi irreali e convenzionali, e riuscire a creare un legame di empatia tra l'artista e i lettori, avvicinandoli a una donna a tratti straniante e malinconica interprete di una 'fiaba' nella quale supera, quasi magicamente, ogni tribolazione, trasfigurandola sulla tela in energia e bellezza.

Key words: Frida Kahlo; Art; Pain; Resilience; Children's Books.

Parole chiave: Frida Kahlo; arte; dolore; resilienza; letteratura per l'infanzia.

Es fuerza reír y abandonarse. Ser ligero.
La tragedia es lo más ridículo
que tiene “el hombre”.

(Kahlo 2005, 69)

1. *Introduction*

According to philosophers of German Idealism pain is necessary. Highlighting the opportunity to eradicate natural inertness linked to good fate Johann Gottlieb Fichte purports pain connected to the sense of need as the safe impulse to all activities, and in the feeling of want – and ensuing motion towards its satisfaction – «la vera *Absicht* del dolore, la sua vera finalità; Hegel definisce il dolore il privilegio (*das Vorrecht*) delle nature più elevate, che sentono e che vivono» (Tagliavia 2011, 46). And as Schopenhauer wrote at a later stage «Se la nostra vita fosse senza fine e senza dolore, a nessuno forse verrebbe in mente di domandarsi perché il mondo esista e perché sia fatto proprio così, ma tutto ciò sarebbe ovvio» (1992, 938-939).

Pain, hence, whatever its origin and in whatever way it is experienced, «rompe il ritmo abituale dell’esistenza, produce quella discontinuità sufficiente per gettare nuova luce sulle cose ed essere insieme *patimento e rivelazione*. Il mondo si vede in un modo in cui mai prima si era visto» (Natoli 1987, 8).

Art has always associated with pain. Throughout the centuries human suffering has led the hand of the greatest men of genius in the fields of painting, sculpture, music, theatre. Creating images and stories, or moulding hard stone, ensue from a process in which the feeling of life, the wound inflicted therein by pain are connected to the need to overcome the annihilating power of desperation. One needs only consider paintress Artemisia Gentileschi: as the victim of a rape and at the centre of a shameful trial, she seized her torment and turned it into Art.

The reiterated view expressed by Eugenio Barba, founder of the Odin Teatret, is also extremely interesting: he explains how his existential adventure began as a very lucky child given that he experienced a dreadful pain due to his father’s death at the age of eleven. Witnessing and being present at his beloved father’s slow death was a basic event – his agony lasted all night long (Christoffersen and Raimondo 1992). «È un’esperienza che ogni bambino dovrebbe fare: sperimentare come muore una persona cara. [...] La sua morte fu una grande fortuna per me, scoprii che significa la mancanza, la perdita di qualcosa di essenziale» (Perrelli 2005).

Such brief reference to Artemisia and Barba ideally represent the relationship between trauma and resilience in a multiple personal journey where art turns into the tool and the means whereby the traumatic experience is worked out. Art as an expression of human wounds, as a tool to overcome and heal them, to bear or even dispel – at least for a while – anguish, to try and reach happiness.

Within the frame of Frida’s autobiographical artistic development, *Henry Ford Hospital (The Flying Bed)* (1932) has definitely a great emotional impact: in this work

the artist portrays herself after a miscarriage, laying on a hospital bed, naked and bleeding, with her swollen abdomen. From her hand trickles of blood related to the lost foetus, to the frail bone-frame of her pelvis, to a snail symbol of the horrific lengthiness of miscarriage, and a purple orchid, the flower Diego Rivera brought to her while she was in hospital and which would be a reference to sexuality and to love. On Frida's face a tear: the great sadness and suffering of that terrible event. Otherwise *The Broken Column* (1944) in which she portrayed herself caged in a steel corset that holds her together but where the slash reveals the fractures of her spine: here again tears pour out of her eyes. Physical pain, illness, desolation, solitude, are recurrent themes in her works wherein she expresses, elevates and eases all feelings of sorrow.

In the last part of her short life (she died in 1954, at the age of 47), the abyss created by her endless torment always offset by alcohol and opiates: Frida allowed herself to be overcome by pessimism, thus creating *Without Hope* (1945) in which she seemed to be waiting to be force-fed or to have just regurgitated some food mixture hanging over her bed as a jelly-like blob: a disturbing picture from which she observes us in tears once again. (Souter 2007, 148). Referring to *Henry Ford Hospital* M. Lowe also notes «In entrambi i lavori la pittrice ricorre alla massa organica per suggerire ciò che non riesce ad esprimere, e dipinge l'indefinibile per esorcizzarlo» (1999, 133). Never before had a woman depicted on canvas the tormenting poetry of her life as Frida Kahlo did.

2. *Frida: A Life of Constant Suffering and Great Passions*

The name Frida comes from the German name Frieda where *Frieden* means peace, yet in the life of the artist there would be quite the reverse of peace and tranquillity. She was born in 1907 in Coyoacán, at that time a suburb of Mexico City, and at the age of six she fell ill with poliomyelitis. Her right leg being severely affected – for that reason she was nicknamed 'Frida pata de palo' (Wooden Leg) (Jamis 2003, 46-47) – at the age of forty-six she underwent amputation. Hence, Frida seemed destined to suffer, yet no one would love life more than she did. She learnt her passion for art from her father Wilhelm-Guillermo, a great photographer born in Baden-Baden where he lived until he reached the age of twenty (Jamis 2003, 11-12). From an early age she stood out at school for her ingeniousness and irreverent brilliance; in 1922 she was admitted to the *Escuela Nacional Preparatoria*, the best High School in Mexico. «Grazie a mio padre ebbi un'infanzia meravigliosa; [...] fu per me un magnifico modello di tenerezza, bravura e soprattutto di comprensione per tutti i miei problemi» (Herrera 2016, 4). Guillermo, who broke away from his normative role, inverted the traditional behavioural pattern and quitted with power and authority in favour of a caring role, usually played by mothers, providing his daughter with the sort of education fit for a male child (Casoli 2012, 169-176).

On 17th September 1925 the bus on which Frida was returning home from school crashed into a street car. Frida was seriously injured. The outcome was: a fracture of

the third and fourth lumbar vertebrae, three fractures of her pelvis, eleven fractures of her right foot, luxation of her left elbow, permanent dislocation of her right shoulder, deep wound in her abdomen caused by a handrail that penetrated her left hip and came out of her vagina, «mi attraversò come la spada il toro» (Jamis 2003, 75) and jeopardized her chances of motherhood.

E il mondo diventa mediocrità. E il mondo interiore diventa indicibile. Un urlo silenzioso che fende il muro del corpo ogni momento. La vita, questo capolavoro sempre pericolante. Dilaniata in tutti i sensi tra vita e morte. [...] E la sensazione, che da allora non mi ha più abbandonato, che il mio corpo raccolga ferite, tutte le ferite (cit. in Jamis 2003, 72).

A series of tragic events that would mark her life, though the constant pain would not prevent her from making a name for herself as an artist, while death would dance around her bed at night (Souter 2015, 23). After being discharged from hospital, she was bedridden for months and there she had to lay motionless, without turning her head: she could only stare at the ceiling imprisoned in her own body. An idea occurred to her mother: she had a mirror placed over Frida's bed so that, at least, she could look at herself. Initially, she only perceived her mirrored figure, but after a while a galaxy of images started dancing before her eyes. Prior to her accident, drawing had been a pastime for her, but from then onwards it became her last hope, an instrument, the only way to go on, the tool to express herself, to overcome her suffering; portraying herself in order to reveal her world, a way to explore her own Self, studded with fantastic and terrifying inner visions. «Lo specchio è terra fertile di coltura per quell'altro/altra da sé che rappresentano, nella sofferenza, la continuità con la salute e la gioia» (D'Elia 2006, 38).

After the accident, the essential content of her life and of her art works focused on pain, strength, blood and life. The physical and moral torment endured during convalescence by this extremely sensitive woman was strikingly transformed into art (Bianchi 2017, 49). In 1953, while spending some time with Frida Kahlo in the Casa Azul to interview her with the aim of writing her biography, Raquel Tibo wrote:

Sempre orgogliosa fu la sua reazione alle avversità. Civettuola ed estremamente sentimentale, se le circostanze le impedivano di sfruttare le sue grazie femminili sfidava la sorte vestendosi da uomo per riaffermare la sua forza e nascondere difetti fisici e apparecchi ortopedici (2002, 25-26).

At the end of 1927 she finally managed to stand on her feet again and through painting she attempted to create a reality that had not decayed [?? L'autore veirifichi il tempo del verbo, forse più cpndizionale che passato], like her own body: she started mixing 19thc. Mexican portrait-painting with popular culture and pre-Colombian primitivism elements, thus generating altogether a new style¹.

¹ This paper does not specifically focus on Frida Kahlo's art, thus it refers the reader to the large literature on the subject. Suggested readings are as follows: Bonito Oliva, Achille, and Martha Zamora. 2005. *Frida Kahlo. Art e dossier*, n. 213. Firenze-Milano: Giunti; Sileo, Diego. ed. 2018. *Frida Kahlo oltre il mito*. Milano: 24 Ore Cultura. Catalogue of the exhibition held at the Mudec-Museum of Cultures, Milan, 1st February - 3rd June 2018.

3. *Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera: Story of a Troubled and Painful, yet Indissoluble Love*

Non parlerò di Diego come di ‘mio marito’, perché sarebbe ridicolo: Diego non è mai stato né mai sarà ‘marito’ di nessuno. Non ne parlerò neanche come di un amante, perché lui va oltre qualsiasi riduzione erotica, e se ne parlasse come di un figlio non farei altro che scrivere o dipingere la mia stessa emozione, farei un mio autoritratto e non quello di Diego (Secci 2008, 13).

When Frida announced she was going to marry Diego Rivera, her mother bitterly commented that it would be a marriage between an elephant and a dove (Jamis 2003, 126). Widespread disbelief surrounded the wedding between such an unruly, yet frail girl and that Mexican muralist ‘talent’, who was twice her age, three times her weight and had a name for being an ‘alluring ogre’ besides being a Communist atheist. Diego and Frida, an unconventional couple featuring Diego’s frenzied past and Frida’s experience of grief and solitude, their faith in revolution, the meeting with Trotsky and Breton, the American adventure and the role they played in renovating the world of art. An odd love story, created and expressed through painting in an effort that was at one time unlike and complementary: art and revolution were the only things shared by two beings who explored all possible areas of unreasonableness. An indissoluble and mythical pair that was perfect and contradictory just like the original Mexican duality, the twofold god of Aztec mythological tradition, the two sides of one same god with both a female element, Omecíhuatl, and a male one, Ometecuhtli.

However, we should avoid reducing the issue to triviality and falling into the far-fetching and somewhat melodramatic trap of considering the relationship between the two as a merely tormented and passionate love story (Casoli 2014, 80). Frida too points that out:

Forse, si aspettano di sentire da me lamentele ‘su quanto si soffre’ vivendo accanto a un uomo come Diego. Ma io non credo che gli argini di un fiume soffrano nel lasciarlo scorrere, né che la terra soffra quando piove, e neanche che l’atomo soffra nello scaricare la propria energia. [...] Dentro il mio difficile e oscuro ruolo di alleata di un essere straordinario, ottengo la ricompensa di un punto verde dentro una quantità di rosso: ricompensa di equilibrio. Le pene o le gioie che regolano la vita in questa società marcia di menzogne, nella quale vivo, non sono le mie (Secci 2008, 14-17).

The truth is that their love story was far from perfect, feeding as it did on jealousy and unfaithfulness, yet stirred by an unbelievable passion and «quello che non può dire a Diego con le parole, Frida lo dice con la pittura» (Le Clézio 2008, 116). A bond that grew stronger and stronger despite the fact that they fell out, drew apart and separated. Before dying Rivera wrote «Troppo tardi mi sono reso conto che la parte più bella della mia vita è stato il mio amore per lei» (Herrera 1993, 298).

4. *Frida: the History and the Stories*

Reading means easing one's suffering for a while, putting one's mind to more pleasant thoughts, but it could also mean feeling the pain of others to overcome one's own: the stories others have written in remote times and places at times seem to have been written for our life and our torment. Reading is a way to try and understand the reasons underlying one's experience, that may sometimes be incomprehensible, contrasting it with that of others. Reading also entails allowing rage, because also through acceptance it may vanish and make us more serene: relishing pain and suffering entails getting de-formed, which does not help our own identity to emerge.

Our culture should strive to educate children and young people to experience and embrace within the horizon of their life also suffering, their limits, the loss of dear ones, the shattering of illusions. Similarly to what storytelling has accomplished throughout the centuries, our culture should equip people with the tools to face the difficulties encountered in life. There is the need to explain how all situations may be changed, exposing problems and identifying possible solutions, the need to teach patience and perseverance, shrewdness and courage, to provide the means to transform wounds into gifts, enhancing them rather than hiding them because those very wounds stand for us and are the greatest assets in the world.

Il superamento del dolore, possibile attraverso l'azione educativa, è un processo intriso di speranza, intesa non come passaggio automatico dalla disperazione ad un'idea ipotetica e confusa di felicità, dall'incertezza della sofferenza alla convinzione tout court di oltrepassarla, quanto piuttosto dalla certezza che una ferita aperta possa essere lenita e nel tempo anche sanata. Insomma nel dischiudersi di nuovi orizzonti e di altre prospettive anche nel subbuglio e nello smarrimento dei momenti più critici, nell'aprirsi di nuovo al futuro che si fa speranza per mezzo dell'educazione (Iaquinta, 2015).

One should bear in mind that 'educating the eyes of a child' and venturing on a multiple journey into art lays the foundations to develop and increase – in addition to artistic expression – aesthetic sensitivity, imagination and phantasy (Articoni 2016, 29), «significa sollecitare il pensiero ad andare oltre le soluzioni abituali, a formulare interrogativi nuovi, a ribaltare processi consolidati, a osservare il mondo da più punti di vista» (Pinto Minerva 2012, 20).

The fascination exerted by Frida Kahlo, who merges surrealist and naïf elements with the images and atmosphere connected to her own country, really seems boundless not only in works destined for adult readers, but apparently also and especially in books for children and teenagers, with a range of heterogeneous and astonishing options: literary works that may also be perceived tactically through their materials, exhaling that vital energy which enables the artist to overcome all adversity.

Frida Kahlo. Una biografia surreale is the striking graphic novel by Marco Corona published in 1998. The story starts from the end with Frida's tragic death: death and birth are the starting point for a journey within the two time-space boundaries. A journey that has rightly been defined as 'surrealistic' given that is where the reader is led by the imaginary world evoked by the drawings and the chosen narrative style voicing

the charming black and white pictures.

A 'novel' way of telling stories is *Frida Kablo* by Vanna Cercenà (including illustrations by Marina Sagona) published in 2006 in the series 'Sirene', the first biographical series for girl readers, wholly conceived with a female outlook and with the innovative idea – in those days – of doing without vintage photographs and portraits of the protagonist. The aim was to avoid turning the book into a popular work and to produce, instead, an intriguing history to read as if it were a novel.

Fabian Negrin's picture book *Frida e Diego. Una favola messicana* (2011) is a triumphant dance of colours in Mexican settings during the *Fiesta de los Muertos* and, in this fictitious story, the main characters are Frida and Diego as children who descend into the Land of skeletons: «proprio perché introduce ai territori il tema della morte, proprio perché esplora ciò sta sotto il lavoro di Negrin, è un inno accorato alla vita, ai sentimenti e in primis all'amore» (Fochesato 2012, 46).

Kahlo's unconventional attitude and personal history also come to life in *Viva Frida* (2014), the unmatched work by Yuyi Morales, writer and illustrator, and Tim O'Meara, photographer. By means of simple words and lyrics, and charming photographs, the authors create a bilingual (Spanish and English) story of dream-like beauty narrating the fantastic adventures of a rather peculiar Alice in a very bright *Wonderland*.

Sébastien Perez and Benjamin Lacombe are the writers of *Frida* (2016), a somewhat intense and melancholic work dealing with the main themes in life, from illness to motherhood, and death. A synonym of passion and rebirth, Love prevails in this journey through the redeeming and regenerating power of art.

The work by Jonah Winter and Ana Juan, who have drawn both on her art and her life to write *Frida* (2016), is a moving and warm tribute, an encouragement offered to everyone to overcome difficulties through creativity: a playful homage where even reference to the artist's crude self-portraits are mellowed by prevailing soft lines and a fairy-tale setting.

Sabina Colloredo is the author of *Frida Kablo, autoritratto di una vita* – illustrations by Sara Not – (2016). She uses such a graceful narrative style that reading this book soon becomes extremely pleasurable, with the aim of remembering the artist, introducing her to the younger generations and reconstructing the greatness and total complexity of her artistic mind mirrored in her life.

Frida Kablo by Maria Isabel Sánchez Vegara (2017) is one of the titles in the series 'Piccole Donne, Grandi Sogni' covering the lives of female artists, scientists, adventurers and style icons who, as children, had a dream they pursued at any cost. It does not require much effort to enter Gee Fan Eng's plates and find oneself at once in the world of the Mexican artist, sketched with bright colours and rounded contours, thus realizing how immense talent may derive from intense suffering.

With the fifth edition of the series 'Per aspera ad astra. La forza delle donne' Lorenza Tonani and Sara Ciprandi offer a portrait of *Frida* (2017) that has never been conceived before, an elegant and abstract viewpoint almost transforming the hieratical figure into an idol. A spiritual vision of Frida, a soul wandering among educated

references and flower settings where every item acquires a particular meaning to be disclosed as if it were a puzzle in order to understand the world of Frida's feelings. A book not to be missed.

In *Frida Kablo. Tutti i colori della vita* (2018) – in the series 'I grandi per i piccoli' – also Beatrice Masini outlines how the Mexican artist succeeded in filling her life with colour, fighting till the very last brushstroke. Revealing the coloured world Frida created to younger readers is an opportunity to remind ourselves that everyone's life may be full of joy, wonder, energy against all odds.

Chi era Frida Kablo? by Sarah Fabiny, illustrated by Robert Jerry Hoareè (2018), is full of curious details and pictures describing the life, joys and pains of a strong-minded woman who loved beauty and, in particular, that of her native land, Mexico, indisputably the protagonist in her art. A great biography fit for children, a source of information on Kahlo's formative years, on her private life and her contribution to the world of art.

María Hesse is the writer of *Frida Kablo. Una biografia*, a unique graphic novel, filled with scattered hearts, cactus plants, palettes, water-melon slices and, from its flyleaves, a repeated picture of Frida with a scroll bearing 'Viva la vida' on it. Indeed, though her body was permanently marked by suffering and pain, Frida always clinged to life and its moments of joy. And Hesse's illustrations clearly show that she always chose extremes, swinging from bright colours to black, from happiness to the deepest sorrow.

Io sono Frida (2018) by Sophie Faucher, illustrated by Cara Carmina, is an exciting journey into the artist's childhood, Frida being a lively little girl full of interest in the world around her. The detailed and extremely intense plates guide the way to discovering her universe not even illness could drain of colour. Infinity seen through wide open eyes, the eyes of a little girl filled with amazement.

Isabel Thomas with Marianna Madriz have written *Frida Kablo. Guide per piccoli alle vite dei grandi* (2019), a lively booklet in a series dealing with events in the life of the most outstanding people in the world and in history. The illustrations on a white background appear soft and light, the line is fresh and not at all babyish. A precious, essential picture book.

Last (due to its date of publication) but not least is *Frida Kablo nella sua casa azul* (2019) which appeals to one's soul. It is a striking picture book by Chiara Lossani illustrated by Michelangelo Rossato who explains his contribution in an interview:

Frida era una persona sanguigna, uterina, non facilmente classificabile: i suoi volti, impressi nelle moltissime fotografie [...] sono stati la partenza della mia indagine. Frida essere umano, la donna dietro la tela, dietro ai fiori e agli abiti colorati. Questo mi interessava indagare, mentre non mi interessava aggiungere o dire altro sulla sua opera, che parla già da sola. È un libro diviso in due, con due stili differenti: la realtà, un collage di disegni a matita e carte colorate, e il mondo della sua arte, che ho raccontato attraverso piccoli dipinti ad acrilico. Dicotomia e unione, i frammenti della vita di Frida, linguaggi divisi e uniti come l'artista e la sua immagine, come la vita e l'arte, la gioia e il dolore. Come ognuno di noi².

² Articoni Angela, Interview with Michelangelo Rossato, March 4, 2019.

One may narrate suffering without clashing with storytelling, using metaphors and imagery, fantastic elements youngsters are accustomed to. Such codes may turn into a link between the real world and imagination given that, after all, faced with suffering one has to resort to abstract reasoning whatever one firmly believes in (Articoni 2016, 111). Delightful stories on Frida Kahlo's dramatic life luckily transfigured by art: echoes and visions, works of serene, moving beauty, in which the text refers to the pictures and the artist's paintings thanks to a kaleidoscopic mixture of words and images. Interactive books with Frida perceived as tangibly present, as if the ironical and tender duel with death had ended with the granting of immortality. The one reserved for artists.

5. Conclusion

Kahlo is a great example of resilience, the ability not only to withstand difficulties, but also to transform herself and adapt to change, no matter how extensive and sweeping it is, by positively reorganizing her life without alienating her own identity. She has used her own narration, a tool that plays a fundamental role in therapy, because those who narrate make their inner world stronger, tidy up their experiences and ensure for themselves a sense of cohesion and greater comprehension of what is happening to them. Her diary too is a hymn to the power of the fantastic world within her, and to her own imagination directed to passing on her art, but mainly to bearing witness to her own life (Kahlo and Lowe 2014).

Destiny may disturb, hurt, destroy life, add pain to suffering, it may seem an instance of unbearable cruelty and injustice, cause fear. With reference to the 'words and writings that heal' and we definitely also add artistic expression as the narration of oneself, Daniela Dato states that they may

rivelarsi utile "terapia" per far fronte al dolore, alle trasformazioni che la malattia comporta al corpo e all'anima, sia in situazioni di spaesamento e di confusione, di ricerca di sé, dove il narrarsi e l'ascoltare narrazioni può, invece, configurarsi quale strumento "clinico-pedagogico" di ri-progettazione e di ricompattazione – mai definitiva – del proprio sé frantumato (2007, 93).

Poetry, literature, writing, art, may turn into a 'hospital of the soul', they stand for an 'educational place', a place for therapy, analysis, anamnesis, as well as for planning and replanning, for transformation and change of one's personal and social self. Frida has transformed her creativity, her self-portraits, her uninterrupted diary and autobiographical poetry into the *pharmakon* of redemption and rebirth.

La parola rimette al mondo la realtà, ricrea la nuova Frida, dà corpo alle sue visioni, brucia i fantasmi, realizza i desideri alleandosi all'immagine [...]. Parola dopo parola, emerge la sua lotta contro il male, il dolore fisico, la sofferenza, la malattia, il mal di vivere e [...] subentra il bene, la guarigione, la gioia, l'allegria (D'Elia 2006, 44, 49).

And surprisingly Kahlo, being a female artist, mixes spiritual aspirations with physical necessities to understand that knowing oneself was not enough: she had to reinvent herself in order to be herself (Lowe 1999, 52), taking care of her lifetime. As Luigina Mortari claims one has to ‘take care of life, being reconciled with the past and looking forward to the future trustingly’ and, above all, ‘coltivare il desiderio di esistere’ and ‘imparare ad aver cura di sé’ so as not to neglect ‘the art of living’ that is crucial to shape one’s life in the best possible way (2006, 68-69).

Frida greets us joyfully, waltzing with the Companion, with the playful and familiar attitude Mexicans have towards death – the ‘Pelona’, the ‘mangy bitch’, the ‘mocking Death of the *Mexicanidad*’ – a last statement of *alegría*:

Otto giorni prima di morire, quando le sue ore erano immerse nell’oscurità della fine ormai prossima, Frida Kahlo intinse il pennello in una vernice rosso sangue e scrisse il suo nome [...] sulla polpa scarlatta della fetta centrale (di una anguria). Poi, in maiuscolo, tracciò il suo saluto finale alla vita: VIVA LA VIDA (Herrera 1993, 299).

Bibliography

- Articoni, Angela. 2016. “Narrare la morte: l’elaborazione del lutto attraverso la letteratura per l’infanzia”. In *Mors certa, hora incerta. Tradiciones, representaciones y educación ante la muerte*, edited by Sara González Gómez, Ivan Pérez Miranda, and Alba M. Gómez Sánchez, 101-125. Salamanca: FahrenHouse.
- Articoni, Angela. 2017. *Arte bambina. Viaggio nella letteratura artistica per l’infanzia*. Roma: Aracne.
- Bianchi, Lavinia. 2017. “Fra due mondi. Sguardi educativi e interculturali nella vita e nelle opere di Frida Kahlo”. *Ricerche di Pedagogia e Didattica – Journal of Theories and Research in Education*, 12: 41-57. Accessed June 8, 2019. doi: 10.6092/issn.1970-2221/7636
- Bonito Oliva, Achille, and Martha Zamora. 2005. *Frida Kahlo*. Art e dossier, n. 213. Firenze-Milano: Giunti.
- Casoli, Andrea. 2012. “La formazione maschile di Frida Kahlo”. In *Más Igualdad. Redes para la Igualdad*, edited by Milagro Martín Clavijo, 169-176. Siviglia: ArCiBel.
- Casoli, Andrea. 2014. “Una sfida al dominio maschile. La rivoluzione ironica dei generi nell’opera di Frida Kahlo”. In *Donne e Potere. Paradossi e ambiguità di una difficile relazione*, edited by Antonella Cagnolati and Sandra Rossetti, 77-93. Roma: Aracne.
- Christofferesen, Erik Exe, and Mario Raimondo. 1992. eds. *In cammino attraverso il teatro* (video documentary). <https://bit.ly/2FrloZG>. Accessed June 8, 2019.
- Dato, Daniela. 2007. “La cura di sé. Storie al femminile”. In *Dimensioni della Cura al femminile. Percorso pedagogico-letterario sull’identità di genere*, edited by Daniela Dato, Barbara De Serio, and Anna G. Lopez, 73-125. Bari: Mario Adda.
- D’Elia, Anna. 2006. “Nello Specchio di Frida Kahlo”. In *Donne tra arte, tradizione e cultura. Mediterraneo e oltre*, edited by Isabella Loiodice, and Franca Pinto Minerva, 37-49. Padova: Il Poligrafo.

- Fochesato, Walter. 2012. "I colori del Messico". *Andersen* 290: 46.
- Herrera, Hayden. 1993. *Frida. Vita di Frida Kahlo*. Milano: La Tartaruga.
- Herrera, Hayden. 2016. *Frida. Una biografia di Frida Kahlo*. Vicenza: Neri Pozza.
- Iaquinta, Tiziana. 2015. "Educare al dolore". *MeTis. Mondi educativi. Temi, indagini, suggestioni*, 06. <https://bit.ly/2tBtzx3>. Accessed June 8, 2019.
- Jamis, Rauda. 2003. *Frida Kahlo. La donna e l'artista selvaggia, visionaria e seducente*. Milano: Tea.
- Kahlo, Frida. 2005. *The Diary of Frida Kahlo: an Intimate Self-Portrait*. New York: Abrams.
- Kahlo, Frida. 2014. *Il diario di Frida Kahlo. Autoritratto intimo*, edited by Sarah M. Lowe. Milano: Electa.
- Le Clézio, Jean-Marie. 2008. *Diego e Frida. Un amore assoluto e impossibile sullo sfondo del Messico rivoluzionario*. Milano: Il Saggiatore.
- Lowe, Sarah M. 1999. *Frida Kahlo. Autoritratto in frammenti*. Milano: Selene.
- Mortari, Luigina. 2006. "La cura come asse paradigmatico del discorso pedagogico". *La cura in pedagogia*, edited by Vanna Boffo, 59-83. Bologna: Clueb.
- Natoli, Salvatore. 1987. *L'esperienza del dolore. Le forme del patire nella cultura occidentale*. Milano: Feltrinelli.
- Perrelli, Franco. 2005. "Il teatro di Eugenio Barba la Puglia e il mito di Odino". *La Repubblica*, September 29. <https://bit.ly/2OokiBX>. Accessed June 8, 2019.
- Pinto Minerva, Franca. 2012. "La mente creativa". In *La creatività a scuola*, edited by Franca Pinto Minerva, and Maria Vinella, 25-44. Roma-Bari: Laterza.
- Secci, Maria Cristina. ed. 2008. *Doppio ritratto di Frida Kahlo, Diego Rivera*. Roma: Notte-tempo.
- Sileo, Diego. ed. 2018. *Frida Kahlo oltre il mito*. Milano: 24 Ore Cultura.
- Schopenhauer, Arthur. 1992. *Il mondo come volontà e rappresentazione*. Milano: Mondadori (ediz.origin.: 1819).
- Souter, Gerry. 2005. *Frida Kahlo. Beneath the mirror*. New York: Parkstone International.
- Souter, Gerry. 2007. *Frida Kahlo: 1907-1954*. Terzo (AL): Gribaudo.
- Tagliavia, Grazia. 2011. "Il dolore, una ferita incurabile? Linee di fenomenologia e/o antropologia del dolore umano: limite esistenziale, crisi del senso, solidarietà possibili". In *Il Dolore e la Speranza. Cura della responsabilità, responsabilità della cura*, edited by Luigi Alici, 37-60. Roma: Aracne.
- Tibol, Raquel. 2002. *Frida Kahlo. Una vita d'arte e di passione*. Milano: Rizzoli.

Fiction

- Cercenà, Vanna, and Marina Sagona. 2006. *Frida Kahlo*. San Dorligo della Valle (Trieste): Einaudi.
- Tonani, Lorenza, and Sara Ciprandi. 2017. *Frida*. Pavia: Hop.

- Colloredo, Sabina, and Sara Not. 2016. *Frida Kablo, autoritratto di una vita*. San Dorligo della Valle (Trieste): EL.
- Corona, Marco. 1998. *Frida Kablo. Una biografia surreale*. Roma: Stampa Alternativa.
- Hesse, Maria. 2018. *Frida Kablo. Una biografia*. Milano: Solferino.
- Fabiny, Sarah, and Robert J. Hoare. 2018. *Chi era Frida Kablo?* Milano: Nord-Sud.
- Faucher, Sophie, and Carmina Cara. 2018. *Io sono Frida*. Milano: Rizzoli.
- Juan, Ana, and Jonah Winter. 2016. *Frida*. Modena: Logos.
- Lossani, Chiara, and Michelangelo Rossato. 2019. *Frida Kablo nella sua casa azul*. Milano: Arka.
- Masini, Beatrice, and Sarah Wilkins. 2018. *Frida Kablo. Tutti i colori della vita*. San Dorligo della Valle (Trieste): Emme.
- Morales, Yuyi, and Tim O'Meara. 2014. *Viva Frida*. New York: Roaring Brook Press.
- Negrin, Fabian. 2011. *Frida e Diego. Una favola messicana*. Roma: Gallucci.
- Perez, Sébastien, and Benjamin Lacombe. 2016. *Frida*. Milano: Rizzoli.
- Sánchez Vegara, Maria Isabel, and Gee Fan Eng. 2017. *Frida Kablo. Piccole donne, grandi sogni*. Milano: Fabbri.
- Thomas, Isabel, and Marianna Madriz. 2019. *Frida Kablo. Guide per piccoli alle vite dei grandi*. Roma: Gallucci.