

## **Narratives of childhoods in the Atacama Desert projecting imaginaries of climate change**

Though contemporary Chilean "adult" writers have dramatized the water crisis in Chile, local young readers' novels tend to avoid topics such as water contamination, shortage or unequal distribution in the mining regions of northern Chile. While Chilean literature labelled as literature for young readers' shuns these matters, there are authors who have written short novels for the broader audience featuring young protagonists struggling in the most arid desert. And though--to the local market--it may not seem appropriate to write or publish about threatening topics for the younger audience, books such as Hernán Rivera Letelier's *Romance del duende que me escribe las novelas* (2005) and María José Ferrada's *Kramp* (2017) make their way to the hands of young readers. Both, Rivera Letelier and Ferrada reflect on the harsh lives of children growing up in the Atacama Desert.

In this presentation I will explore the rhetoric devices deployed by Rivera Letelier and Ferrada to construct their imaginaries of childhood (following María Nicolajeva and Susan Honeyman); particularly of those "childhoods" rooted in apparently lifeless, waterless and seemingly "childless" geographies, where the presence or absence of water constitutes a life-sustaining essences and an identity marker (following Mauricio Ostría). Since these novels circulate among young readers, my argument is that despite the authors' disregard of their potential YA audience, precisely because they portray the vulnerability of growing up in the desert, they contribute to raising awareness of water scarcity and what it would mean to live in extreme environments as climate changes around the globe.