Rosanna Licari
*Sofia visits the Clairvoyant, 1946*

He sees her coming.
It will be a short visit and
hers will be a long life.
She will travel over water.

Her mother has sent her.
She looks round
the whitewashed room –
on the wall, a carved crucifix,
on top of a cupboard,
a red piano accordion decorated
with madre perla
like the one her missing brother
played folk songs on.

The grey-handed man smiles and tells
her that, yes, it is similar to the one
at her house. He looks up at the cupboard
and says: ‘He’s alive.’ But
Vladimiro never comes home.

Stuart Cooke
*Two Mapuche Poets*

Chile is a land of extraordinary poetic heritage. The twentieth Century saw Pablo Neruda and Gabriela Mistral both win Nobel Prizes for their poetry, while others like Vicente Huidobro, Pablo de Rocla and Nicanor Parra also had a powerful late- and post-modernist influence across the Spanish- and English-speaking worlds. As it enters the new century, Chile is experiencing yet another poetic revolution, although this time it is occurring in dramatically different circumstances. With the publication of *Epw mari ilhantofe ta fachantii* (‘Twenty Contemporary Mapuche Poets’) in 2003, Mapuche poetry was firmly established as a vital component of Chilean literature.1 The remarkable strength and diversity of work in the anthology spoke of an explosive and original creativity comparable to Indigenous art and writing here in Australia.

The Mapuche people are indigenous to Central and Southern Chile and Southern Argentina. At present they make up about four per cent of the Chilean population, but they are particularly concentrated in the southern region of Araucanía. They resisted European invasion of their lands from the early 1600s until 1881, a remarkable feat representing the most successful resistance to colonial incursion in
recorded history. The ül, or traditional song, is considered the primary antecedent of the contemporary Mapuche lyric. Prior to invasion, composition and recital of ül, along with the sacred tayel, constituted the entirety of Mapuche poetic practice. Coupled with the rendition of stories, or epeu, Mapuche literary traditions were purely oral. Oral poetic practice still has considerable significance as a form of intracultural discourse that maintains the strength and vitality of Mapuche communities.

After the invasion of southern Chile, Mapuche people were taken from their lands and placed in grossly inadequate reservations. By the early 1900s this policy was giving way to the forced integration of many Mapuche people into Chilean urban life. Correspondingly, a second phase of Mapuche literature began to develop. Known as oralidad escrita (written orality), it refers to the written translations of ül into Spanish. The reception of Mapuche literature moved from purely intracultural contexts to intercultural ones (we might align this phase with the transcription of songs in T.G.H. Strehlow’s Songs of Central Australia).

It was not until the middle of the twentieth century, however, that Mapuche authors began to conceive of and produce their own written texts. Some of these, like the following poems by Leonel Lienlaf, are written in both Spanish and Mapuzungun, and therefore have highly explicit intercultural characters. Of the two poets whose work is present here, Paulo Huirimilla’s movement away from the structures of traditional Mapuche song poetry is far more vagrant, resulting in a fresh, hybrid poetic. Lienlaf, however, achieves more of a syncretism between the song structures of the ül and contemporary written forms.

Like Pablo Neruda, Lienlaf burst onto the Chilean literary scene at an extremely young age. His first book, Se ha despertado el ave de mi corazón (‘The Bird of My Heart has Awoken’), was published in 1989 when he was just twenty years old, and went on to win a variety of prestigious awards. Unlike many contemporary Mapuche poets, Lienlaf grew up in a rural Mapuche community, and only moved to Temuco, the capital of Araucania, to study in his late teens. He has said on more than one occasion that he does not feel he is a poet in the individualist sense that a winka (a non-Indigenous Chilean) would define the term. ‘More than a representative of my culture,’ he says, ‘I come from it. I am an expression of it’.

Lienlaf’s poetry uses traditional song structures within a wider context of Mapuche colonisation and subjugation. His position is certainly ambiguous, then, oscillating as it does between two worlds, and this ambiguity is reflected in his mode of publication: his books are bilingual, written by the poet in both Mapuzugun and Spanish, in order to appeal to readers of both languages. Nevertheless, there are clear and undeniable links between what the reader sees as written poems and the ül to which they all refer. Perhaps Lienlaf’s interest in traditional song poetry is demonstrated most clearly by the fact that, in the fourteen years between the publication of his two books of poems, he also produced a compact disc entitled Canto y poesía mapuche (‘Mapuche Song and Poetry’) in 1998. This was his most concrete realisation of more than a decade of research into Mapuche oral poetics.

In more recent years, Mapuche poets like Paulo Huirimilla have moved to the very forefront of Chilean avant-garde poetics and culture. Huirimilla has published two books of poetry, the most recent of which was the highly regarded and influential Palimpsesto (‘Palimpsest’) in 2005, as well as a considerable body of material on the internet. In 2008 he visited Australia to take part in the launch of Espejo de Tierra (‘Earth Mirror’), a bilingual anthology of poetry by Mapuche and Aboriginal Australian poets. While in the country he was struck by some of the similarities between Koori and Mapuche mythologies, which became manifest in ‘rivers of Swans’ in the following selection.

Reading Huirimilla is like reading an Indigenous Chilean version of Michael Farrell’s poetry: his work is a composition of fragments and voices; samples from French modernist poetry jostle with scenes from cowboy movies and references to Mapuche cosmology. He is sarcastic and devilishly funny, yet highly attuned to contemporary trends in poetics both in Chile and internationally. Interestingly, however, the ül retains a strong presence in his work. Many of the poems in Palimpsesto,
for example, are titled either as *canto* (songs) or as *ül*. Indeed, like Lienlaf, Huirimilla has produced and performed on a compact disc of traditional Mapuche song poems.

So before reading the following poems, it is necessary to emphasise the very special importance of the word, and of its being spoken, in Mapuche culture. Indeed, we might suggest that if there is a particular cultural trait that distinguishes the Mapuche people, it is the fundamental role of language in their social fabric. For speaking is not only a medium of communication and expression, but an art form. As such, one’s ability to use language, even in contemporary contexts, is highly valued and contributes greatly to one’s social prestige.

Oratory – translated into Spanish, the capacity for *hablar bien* (to speak well) – is so valued that one who possesses it is known as a *wenpin*, or one who conserves Mapuzugun (literally: ‘the language of the earth’). It is no coincidence that many of the following poems are concerned with environmental destruction: the poet, the conserver of the earth’s language, speaks also for the conservation of the earth.

It is the earth’s language which determines an understanding of the universe, and of the relationships between all things. For prominent Mapuche poet and critic Elicura Chihuailaf, the words of Mapuzugun express the conception of the world as it was created by his ancestors – words are, he says, the world’s gestures (*gestualidad*). Language, therefore, functions on a variety of levels. Firstly, there is its synthetic quality, or the way it integrates and reinforces social and worldly relationships. There is also its historical function, in which the moment of speaking necessarily reinforces the speaker’s relationship with his or her origins and ancestors, while at the same time conserving and transmitting their values and beliefs.

For Chihuailaf, the human being travels through a world invested with gestures which express themselves before they are readily comprehended. Little by little, the discovery of words, of textures, of colours and smells, the ways in which we are impressed by things and by our dreams, are all transformed into language. It is in this language that the presence of the ancestors is to be found, as well as the presence of each individual with his or her actuality and with the creation – and all of its potentiality – of his or her “future”.

This is the base of Mapuche poetics: a profound respect for the virtual realm from which we all come, and into which we all return.

Despite the significant stylistic differences between Lienlaf and Huirimilla, we can sketch a number of general assumptions about their combined corpus. The work of each involves both a rediscovery and reactualisation of one’s ancestral roots in the contemporary world and a return to the source of one’s cultural identity as a way of achieving cultural recuperation as Mapuche writers and community members. As such, we find in their work a series of basic orientations, the foremost of which is a mode of discourse intended to maintain and protect Mapuche tradition. The reader will also note a form of questioning or interrogation of *winka* practices, which is intended to edify Mapuche social and cultural structures; it is a style that demands recognition of Mapuche history, and the validation of their values and traditional knowledges.

Lienlaf and Huirimilla are writing from a space of multiple potentialities: they are reclaiming cultural roots while at the same time attempting to contest their marginal social positions and thereby overcome a sense of fragmentation and disorientation felt by many Mapuche in the present. Very similar to the more public discourse of Mapuche political activists, this complex practice takes poetry towards the very front of cultural resistance. The poem, rather than a mere trace of the past, is the outlet for this past: a living fissure in the present moment.

The modernist void has become a virtuality composed of centuries of ancestral knowledge, as well as displacement, poverty, subjugation and accumulated resentment. Theirs is a genuinely after-modern poetry.

In the cases of both Lienlaf and Huirimilla, the political and cultural import of their work means that translation is undoubtedly necessary, but their poems also require a certain refiguring of the role of translation itself. The notion of an ‘original text’, which the translator must attempt to render faithfully in the new tongue, obscures the multiple origins of their poems. Lienlaf writes in both Mapuzugun and Spanish (from which I translated) – sometimes in Spanish first before translating the poem into Mapuzugun; sometimes the other way around. Huirimilla writes in Spanish, but many of his poems are composed of
vocabulary from Mapuzugun, and of translations from English and French texts. To read Lienlaf or Huirimilla in the ‘original’ Spanish, therefore, is to read work that has already begun to translate itself. I saw own my task as helping these poems to bifurcate yet further.

Where terms or references could not find good homes in the English I have provided explanations. This was particularly important in instances where the poet used a term from Mapuzugun. If, for example, Lienlaf used a word from Mapuzugun in both his Spanish and Mapuzugun versions, then I would also keep this term in the English version. I saw this as an important way to avoid those inadequate translations of difficult Indigenous concepts (such as ‘The Dreaming’ here in Australia), and as a way of maintaining the connection of the poem to the territory from which it came. The agrammatical and sometimes confusing phrasing of Huirimilla’s poems was also maintained. With each translation, my goal was never an ideal ‘revelation’ of the poem, but rather a version which maintained the same silences and disjunctions of the ‘original’. Here, the point of translation is not to copy or replicate, but to reproduce: to grant the poem life in a new form. In doing so, however, the translator should be careful not to reveal what the poet intended to keep hidden.

4 Elicura Chihuailaf, Recado Confidencial a Los Chilenos, Santiago, LOM, 1999, p. 34
5 Ibid. p. 69

The translated poems are from the following publications:
Juan Paulo Huirimilla, Padrípuesto. Santiago, LOM 2005; Se Ha Desesperado El Aire De Mi Corazón. Santiago, Editorial Universitaria, 1898

Leonel Lienlaf

They Took Off the Skin

The surprise attack came three times
we repelled it three times
but now it comes again
and we can’t resist.
The winka is firing.

We must hide ourselves beneath the mountain
so that our spirit might leave
to sleep above the earth
so that all this country
might sleep above the stars.

As soon as I rested my hand
many weapons surrounded us
taking our Chief
while they beat us.

They took the skin from his back
and cut off his head.
Our valiant Chief!
and the skin of his back
they used as a flag
and his head they tied to my waist.

We keep crying and our blood
flows through the land
from time to time I lower my gaze
to the face I carry on my waist.
Do you people understand my tears?
Listen to the air explain them.

The years are passing,
over the fire the nests are passing,
the earth is passing
and I am already losing myself
between the words
Listen to my tears speak.

### Lautraro

Lautraro – also known as Lautaro (1534–1557), was a leader of the Mapuche resistance during the first phase of the Spanish invasion. He has been immortalised in countless street and suburb names and sculptures in southern Chile, and also appears in Pablo Neruda’s *Canto General*.

**malón** – traditionally refers to a hostile Indian attack; using it to refer to the invasion of the Spaniards is, therefore, deliberately ironic.

**winka** – is the name Mapuche people use to refer to a non-indigenous Chilean (like *balanda*, *kartiwa*, etc).
Meulen

Amidst clouds of dust
Meulen came down to the valleys,
whispering beneath the rocks

They say
that in the early morning
Meulen flew
across the sky

Asleep between the vegetables
I was listening to his murmurs,
the soft night passed between the hills

Veloz,
a bird of dust
numbed my face
with its flight.

Kürrijf

Over the cleared country
anguished
the wind whirls about;
over the dust and the ashes
the nests blown
from where birds dreamed

The wind
went crazy between the rocks
because to its ears
the soft song of the trees
came no longer.

Sunset

Bird calls
and on the paths
the shadows come out to look
at the slow passage of colours
over the horizon

The distant whirring of the chainsaws
shakes the falling night
over faded cinnamon trees.

Meulen — (Mapudungun) a whirlwind.
Veloz – rapid, quick. An association is being made between Latauro, who was also known as a ‘fast bird’ for his guerrilla techniques, and the movement of the bird in the poem.
Paulo Huirimilla

*Warrior Song*

I hunter-gatherer
urbanite of jacket and leather
Combed with hair gel
born in shit
From Pedro Eriazo
With a harmonica
between my teeth
I stammer for the deaths
of my ancestors
With a split scowl
Few words
I have lost
My identity card.
I watch the gangsters
who search for us in dreams
Because we cut the eucalyptus gas
And lit fires
with candles of the virgin mother
Now I speak with a sneer
Turning in circles
until the smoke burns
And the water keeps falling.
I stretch out for the tree in the river
with a piece of Licán
So that death won’t return
with that bird from the city
So ominous at night

— it is always the other
in the shattered reflection
of a photograph —
the words Castilian or Chilean
mean nothing
they emptied in a well
in which my teeth chatter
I can only be with her in childhood
when my hands could clasp
a swing by the plum tree
flowering with roots bending inwards.
So this is reality
a scar on a bandaged man
who remembers travels across the ocean
In the beginning
And the music of our bones heading towards death.

*Poetics*

Oh! Reader! My object of study
The most western point of the labyrinth
Fix this frothy drivel
Because poetry is a green feature film
A cowboy movie
And you are the Indian who will never reach
The stagecoach
Because John Wayne has aimed his rifle
Between your teeth
And the pale-faced knife
Is hidden deep within my writing
Oh my reader! Enemy
Race the clock to your left
Your insides will fill with blood.

*Stagecoach* – the Spanish word for *la diligencia* (stagecoach) also refers to both speed and diligence.

Rivers of Swans

1
The river of swans sprays foam
On the ocean of the white page,
Searching for the red crest and black neck
In the signs of the lamilla.
Seagulls shout out in the red glow of autumn
Leaves stripped from the trees.
The river of swans has diminished
Its plumage taken by the black tide.

2
The bloodstained swans of the river
Can sell their vegetables no longer:
The waters that irrigate

Are full of metals.
The birds land in the courtyard
Of a young swan, a poet who envelopes the patio
With his white gaze.

3
My son, Ave Veloz, awakes to draw
Four birds with black necks
One is his mother who takes him up on her back
Another is of me, who follows and channels the water
The wind and clouds of the landscape:
We are absorbed
By the sun of the picture.

4
The sign of the swan of which Martínez talks
Appears but without meaning
So the man is also die-cast
Who sees from the shore
Four creatures flying
Beneath the same language.

5
The lake filled by the blood of Licarayén
The sunken water and earth
Exploited
Birds to whom Lucila sings
In the language of the Licanantay and the world
Because only they remain
Others
Have been displaced by law and rifle
To the mountains stripped so that we might forget
What is ours.

6
Mallarmé your entire poetic project
Could have been, perhaps,
To write about thousands of swans in winter
With multiple words on only one page
Or to speak from memory poems
Representing the signs of the imagination
Like Rubén Darío or Alfonsina Storni
Whose dream before an ocean breathes in silence.

7
Listen Lucila Fantasma I’ve already lifted
The serf onto my shoulder
And onto the other one a Pingüino
Colour albino
Metao we say
Son of an enchanted bird
Who has left the bank of the lake
For folly
Who doesn’t fly in the wetlands
Now covered with heavy metals.

8
I turn around in the island desert like the black swan with red crest.
I fly around looking for the inland sea.
I have seen it in these other black swans with red crests.
To also see the world with its four directions.
I see one dance and sing the way her grandmother did
and the grandmothers of her grandmothers
and she paints a white fabric with many spots of colour
which become the parallel dreams of my kidnapped grandparents
who speak through my saliva.
They have stolen the children of the black swans with red crests
They have been made to fly to the cities and care for their cattle
Bird sisters who have not returned.
May you swim now, the Koori swans with all your rainbow snakes
That you’ve created
May you search beneath the water for the seaweed
That will make your snakes breathe eternally against oblivion.
The black swan of red crest appears to me in another island
On a page
But its colour is more luminous than rebellion.

9
Lennon sees two completely white swans in the
Thames
I sing to them while the rain
thickens
and the police collect the
bodies
Of the world’s alienated, who see those signs swimming across the landscape of this gloomy guarded city.

In pairs the black necks walk on the ocean And the bodies swim between the black page and the sargassos The acid rain wets their feathers and they peck at themselves searching for part of the rainbow in the water they climb to the river’s edge to bathe after the rain these our birds whose necks should be cut says a poet a musician made them dance on the lake myself I call them from the beach of the petrified cypress and they follow us and launch into flight through the air choked with fumes and ash.


ta la lamilla – a coffee-coloured seaweed eaten by the swans.
Lasianyén – a young virgin sacrificed in order to calm the fury of Añuhauca Volcano, today known more commonly as Osorno Volcano.
Lucanantay – indigenous people from the north of Chile.
Lucila – Lucila Godoy Alcayaga, Gabriela Mistral’s real name.
Juan Luis Martínez – Chilean poet, says that in a poem it is only signification which is important.
Mutro – (Mapuzugun) an albino swan, which is generally of a golden colour.
petrified cypress – the alerce is known as the Patagonian cypress, common in Southern Chile.
Pinganya – (Mapuzugun) a swan.
Añuñauca – (1892–1938) a major Argentinean poet of the post-modernist movement.

General Noriega’s portrait stood on the hotel bar, his cap crusted with laurels, stars the length of his epaulets, his cheeks pock and grainy. The camera had caught him reviewing a parade. Now a year after capture, the General was still the legitimate head of government in Panama, anyway in the view of most Latin American states, and this status suited his bearing in the photograph, his eyes staring down the rest of the world.

His army gone, his irregulars outlawed, twenty thousand US soldiers in occupation of his country, the General’s continued presence in this bar would have surprised him. The place is well known to cab drivers as El Parvo Real on Calle 51, set between the hotels and office blocks of Via Espana and the classy condominiums of Campo Alegre. But to those inside the bar it is called the royal Peacock. A barmaid pulls brown ale from the keg. Ayrshire roses stand in a window vase, and someone can tell you the result of the soccer draw between Crystal Palace and Manchester United.

We were drinking gin from an iced decanter, a system which allowed the choice of tonic for a long drink or a drop of vermouth for a martini. My contact in Panama was to have been a shipping