

***Poetry of the Earth: Mapuche Trilingual Anthology*, edited by Jaime Luis Huenún Villa, Spanish into Mapudungun translation by Víctor Cifuentes Palacios, Spanish into English Translation by Juan Garrido Salgado, Steve Brock and Sergio Holas (Interactive Press, 2014)**

Anthologies of poetry are often collections of disparate works that are representative of a region, a theme, or a school of thought, and the poems anthologised do not necessarily speak to one another but to a more general editorial organising principle. The poems collected and translated in *Poetry of the Earth*, however, have been arranged to work together cumulatively as well as comparatively and paradigmatically, making this a remarkable anthology notable for its broad scope while still retaining intimate cultural connections. Jaime Luis Huenún Villa, the editor who is also a Mapuche-Huilliche poet included in the anthology, provides an illuminating introduction outlining the long history of colonisation and the crucial role of poetry in obtaining autonomy and self-determination for the Mapuche people, but he does not impose a definitive thematic structure; rather, what he offers is a carefully orchestrated ensemble of seven distinctive voices which resonate through the valleys and across the mountains which the poets have so vividly evoked. The editing decision to have each poem in Mapudungun, Spanish and English supports this effect through repetition of Mapudungun words which are scattered throughout the Spanish and English versions, bearing witness to the strength and resilience of a remarkably mystic culture through showcasing a vernacular whose meanings resist assimilation into other languages. *Poetry of the Earth* more closely resembles a map delineating distinct points of reference onto a contoured and complex landscape, providing orientation for navigating the terrain. Pick up your copy of the map and commence your journey as soon as you can: the views are magnificent.

The seven poets featured in the anthology offer poems of mystic dreams and visions which remain entwined with landscape. In ‘Perrimontun’, Maribel Mora Curriao weaves voice, vision, landscape and loss together in a conversation between herself and the moon:

The moon I greeted as a child  
 rose to kiss desires  
 dissolving into nothingness.  
 Daughter  
 – it said –  
 do not come out at dusk  
 dawn flowers will cover your bones.  
 Dreams will give birth [...]  
 Daughter mine  
 the cry of dawn opened your eyes  
 and I abandoned you in the valley,  
 but I keep the dreams  
 you sowed as a child.

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Do not fear  
they blossom from your hands  
now the dawn flowers will give birth. (64)

A footnote explains that *perrimontun* is the supernatural experience or vision of a person initiated as a *machi*, or Mapuche shaman. The poets throughout the collection inhabit this mystic vision when visited by apparitions who speak to them about the continuing connection with land – often a land that they have been removed from – through the act of creating poems (the ‘blossom’ from the hands of the poet).

In ‘Apparition of Likán Amaru’, Bernardo Colipán’s evocation of a visitation from ‘black hawk’ compels him to write, and he describes what comes before the writing in terms of a fecund waiting, echoing Curriao’s sense of nature as providing a spiritual awakening and guidance through inspiration as germination:

No wind, my son, is as swift  
or proud as your flight,

Likán,

The sun was your only seed.

Your first words were  
open me  
I come from the void  
give me your writing. [...]

You and I are two roots  
asleep in a millennial forest.

I am inside you.  
This is why I search for you in the air.  
In the purity  
of the sun caught in your crystal. (22)

While the poems are mystical, they are also on occasion robustly physical in their evocation of cultural practices; in ‘Kollon Pürun’, Paolo Huirimilla conjures the rhythms and repetitions of dance as protest against the silencing of culture:

I’ve begun to put on the mask of kollón  
and to paint my body naming the points of the universe  
with white clay and ashes.  
I dance with a sword and a wooden horse  
in pursuit of wekufü.

I hit the coligües so that the spirit of bonanza follows.  
The balance of things is present in my thoughts  
yaom yaom yaom yaom  
yapuen yapuen yapuen yapuen  
sweat and memory, the dance of beings  
the struggle of the silenced. (102)

The chanting of ceremonial words and the hitting of a bamboo cane, sounds that structure the poem and take us into the rhythms of the ceremony, evoke the good spirit, bonanza, after driving out the evil spirit, wekufü. The dance of *kollón*, we are told in an unobtrusive and accessible footnote, represents the maintaining of order.

In 'My Foye', María Isabel Lara Millapán uses an image of the sacred tree of life, the foye tree whose properties are used to heal, to feel her way as a poet via roots, branches and leaves:

My foye  
My hands have reached your leaves  
In the mystery of stars.

In the path of the moon  
Your roots, branches,  
Flowers and fruit  
Came to find me,  
And I walked with your life  
Towards the forests of my heart. (181)

While many of the poems in this anthology explore the intersections of poetic creation, vision and landscape, there are also poems that speak of the devastating effects of displacement from land and alienation from labour. They are too many to explore here; I will quote in full a poem by Huenún Villa, 'Rauquemó Swans', that speaks about alienation, and the violence against nature that this alienation brings:

We searched for medicinal herbs in the pampas  
(limpialpata and pennyroyal, mint and llantén).  
The sun was violet, the grass covered in frost.  
Rahue flowed dark without the light of fish.

We heard the bellows of cows lost in the market  
and the noise of a tractor on the road to Cancha Larga.  
We arrived at the river and called for a ferry,  
a boat drew near in silence.

They spoke in hushed voices and gave us clubs

with sips of pisco for the cold.  
We swam quickly to avoid cramp.  
The mist enshrouded the bank.

Amid the rushes two bodies of sweet water  
white like two moons in the night river  
bending their two necks of broken silver  
defenceless against the blows and the torrent.

Each of us took a bird by the tail or feet  
and headed to the boat hidden in the trees.  
Men lit their hunting lanterns  
throwing the wounded prey into sacks.

We marched drunk, feathered in death  
singing folk songs and pissing in the wind.  
In the middle of the pampa we fell asleep  
covered in grass, frost and curses. (145-6)

Overwhelmingly, the ‘balance of things’ (as Huirimilla puts it) is at play in the poems collected in *Poetry of the Earth*; nature and culture, life and death, and love and loss are brought into realistic equilibrium, in an act of writing which gestures towards a hope for future generations. Indeed, many of the poems speak to future generations, or ruminate on what possible future Mapuche children will inherit. This is where the poems are most powerful, in creating a regenerative community through writing. Roxana Miranda Rupailaf achieves this, in ‘Partner’, by allowing us to enter into her dream:

A horse flies south in the midst of battle.  
A horse without wings mounted on a cloud,  
calling me to the door of my dreams  
where I am a filly blonder than the sun.  
Indomitable as a thought  
I whinny my illusions with an aroma of herbs.  
I wake up.  
The horse falls from the sky  
and leaves me pregnant. (122)

This poem is sensuous in its evocation of colours, sounds and scents, and in writing the dream her vision takes on material composition, and in doing so a future generation, through dream and vision, are also given shape. The poem itself is pregnant. Omar Huenuqueo Huaiquinao also has his eye to future generations, observing ‘A child in the path of his dream’:

A barefoot child with hazelnut eyes

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lying down in a cart  
talks to the birds  
chattering in the apple tree.  
A hen scratches near the lingue.  
The child walks with his hands in his pockets.  
He talks to the chicks  
and offers them ripe cherries;  
he talks to the trees  
and smiles, content. (214)

Here, the poet conjures a pastoral scene in a vision reminiscent of the Romantic poets, observing the child naturally finding his own path through imaginative play. The balance and simplicity in this lyric provide a contrast to the more anguished poems in the anthology, but this poem is deceptively political too, in the gentle chatter, offerings and smiles of the contented young boy who is resilient, and speaking and moving freely in a world of his own making. He points to possible futures.

The trilingual format is interesting for those who are not acquainted with Mapudungun or Spanish (as I am not), as we can immerse ourselves in the multiplicities each language has to offer by way of rhythm and sound. Out of the multiplicities of contending languages emerges a mystic vision enhanced by repetitions, and it is refreshing to see this mysticism rendered into English, as the language is forced into a fluid thought-world that it does not often easily accommodate. The meanings in many of the poems remain satisfyingly elusive – one cannot pin down these poems – and this is a strength of the collection as a cumulative experience: one dips in, and through visiting the poems the reader works towards an accumulated understanding through glimpses of a culture that is revealed to us as a gathering of individual visions. In reading the whole, a bigger picture builds, a montage of dreams wherein Mapuche culture is embodied and located. As Huenún Villa writes, the poets ‘have created in their works a territory that preserves and projects community and family histories’ (xiv). The editor, and the translators of this anthology – Víctor Cifuentes Palacios translating into Mapudungun from the Spanish in which the poems were originally written, and Juan Garrido Salgado, Steve Brock and Sergio Holas translating from Spanish into English – have succeeded in vividly and fluidly translating these histories to an Australian audience unfamiliar with Mapuche poetry and culture.

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*Melinda Graefe completed her PhD in English at Flinders University, and has published on nostalgia in historical fiction and on the poetry of Syd Harrex (with Molly Murn). She is currently ghost writing a biography of the Australian-born Cambridge classicist, Melian Stawell.*

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