



Literary Landscapes

Literary Landscapes is a monthly column by Indra Wussow a writer, translator and director of the Sylt Foundation.

Chile is a land of extraordinary poetic heritage. In the 20th century both Pablo Neruda and Gabriela Mistral were awarded the Nobel Prizes for their poetry, while others like Vicente Huidobro, Pablo de Rokha and Nicanor Parra had powerful, late post-modernist influences 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 under dramatically different circumstances. With the publication of *Epu mari ülkantufe ta fachantü* ('Twenty Contemporary Mapuche Poets') in 2003, Mapuche poetry was finally and firmly established as a vital component of Chilean literature.

The Mapuche people – 'the people of the earth' – were the first nation living in the territories known today as the states of Chile and Argentina. According to official figures, the Mapuche nation comprises just four per cent of Chile's population. It was the only indigenous nation able to stop the advance of the Spanish Conquest in South America – where the Spaniards signed treaties and negotiated with the Mapuche in terms of their relationship and existence in a mutual space. Only after independence from Spain in 1810 did the Chilean State commence its war against the Mapuche Nation, a conflict which it named the 'Pacification of the Araucanian'. Chile, like so many other colonial nations and states founded by the conquest of territories and people, has its roots in such violence: a violence hidden under words like 'pacify', which was coined during the total defeat of the Mapuches in the wars and raids against the indigenous peoples from 1881 to 1883.

Before the advent of the Spaniards, the Mapuche owned a land of 30 million hectares. Today they call only one per cent of that land their own. Their land was taken over by large land owners and fenced. During the military dictatorship of Pinochet, large parts of the primeval forest were offered to international paper companies who planted monocultures and bereft the Mapuches of 90 per cent of their forests. The auracaria, the holy tree of the Mapuche, disappeared in many parts of what was once their territory. Thus almost every second Mapuche left his home and

moved to the bigger cities, notably to Santiago, to look for a better life and a job.

It is in the capital of Santiago where Mapuche poetry entered the national poetry scene and opened a dialogue between the indigenous peoples and the mainstream Chilean culture. Contemporary Mapuche poetry incorporates a literary culture that is in fluent dialogue with the Eurocentric aesthetics of contemporary Chilean poetry while still drawing on Mapuche oral traditions and histories. Mapuche poetry is an invitation for Chile and other countries with a colonial history to venture down the path of



Jorge Aceituno Moreno, El Gigante de Paruro, b/w photography 2004

art to transform ourselves into a coexistence, becoming one and whole in the shared spaces in which we live.

It was not until the middle of the 20th century, however, that Mapuche authors began to conceive of and produce their own written texts. Some of these, like the poems by Leonel Lienlaf, are written in both Spanish and Mapudungun (the language of the Mapuche), and therefore have highly explicit intercultural characters.

Lienlaf was born in 1969 in the town of Alepue. At the age of ten he began to write in Spanish and Mapudungun.

His first book, *Se ha despertado el ave de mi corazón* ('The Bird of My Heart has Awoken'), was published in 1989 and with it he earned the City of Santiago Literary Prize. Lienlaf achieves a syncretism between the structures of the *ül* (Mapuche personal songs) and contemporary written forms.

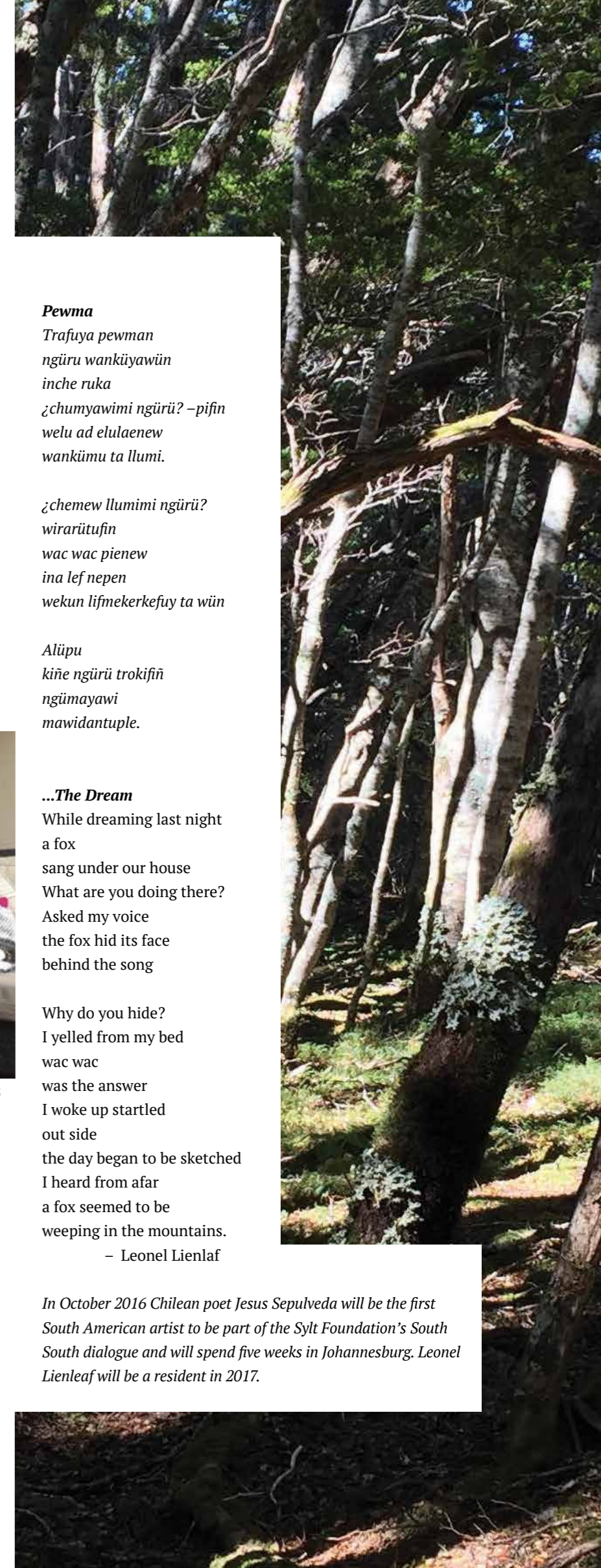
Unlike many contemporary Mapuche poets, Lienlaf grew up in a rural Mapuche community and only moved to Temuco, the capital of Araucanía, to study in his late teens. He has said on more than one occasion that he does not feel he is a poet in the individualist sense that a *winka* (a non-indigenous Chilean) 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 Mapudungun and Spanish, in order to appeal to readers of both languages.



In conversation with the poets Leonel Lienlaf and Alvaro Leiva Ramirez

His is an incredible balancing act between tradition and modernity and the impact of it on the culture of his people. His readings are well attended and, due to poets like him, there is a vast interest in Mapuche culture and literature in Chile today. It is still very difficult to find publishers for works in the indigenous languages but a lot of progress has been made and it seems that rewriting Chilean history while honouring all its peoples has started the important historical revision of the Pinochet years. But that is another story to tell. **CF**

Primeval forest in Southern Chile



Pewma

*Trafuya pewman
ngüru wanküyawün
inche ruka
¿chumyawimi ngürü? –pifin
welu ad elulaenew
wankümu ta llumi.*

*¿chemew llumimi ngürü?
wirarütufin
wac wac pienew
ina lef nepen
wekun lifmekerkefuy ta wün*

Aliüpu

*kiñe ngürü trokifin
ngümayawi
mawidantuple.*

...The Dream

While dreaming last night
a fox
sang under our house
What are you doing there?
Asked my voice
the fox hid its face
behind the song

Why do you hide?
I yelled from my bed
wac wac
was the answer
I woke up startled
out side
the day began to be sketched
I heard from afar
a fox seemed to be
weeping in the mountains.

– Leonel Lienlaf

In October 2016 Chilean poet Jesus Sepulveda will be the first South American artist to be part of the Sylt Foundation's South South dialogue and will spend five weeks in Johannesburg. Leonel Lienlaf will be a resident in 2017.