

## “We are fire and earth still”, Cristian Cayupán



**Selection and introduction by Mabel García Barrera**  
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Bilingual Cristian Cayupán is recognized as the poet with the most potential in the area of Mapuche and Indo-american Literature Studies. He lives in Southern Chile, in the city of Temuco, in the José Cayupán community of the Mequewe area. Cayupán has published several collections which include *Poemas Prohibidos* (prohibited poems) (2007), *Reprimida Ausencia* (repressed absence) (2009), *Usuarios del silencio* (users of the silence) (2012), *Tratado de Piedras* (treaty of rocks) (2014), *Terruño* (homeland) (2014), *El hombre y su piedra* (the man and his rock) (2016), *Apología del barro. Fotra ñi llellipun* (clay's apology) (2017). In collaboration with Ana Ñanculef, Cayupán has also co-authored a book of ethnographic research entitled *KuifikeZugu. Discursos, relatos y oraciones rituales en mapuzugun* (discourses, stories and ritual prayers in Mapuzugun)(2016).

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He is the manager and editor of the Magazine *Comarcas. Literatura sin Fronteras*. (borderlines, literature without borders) which has been in continuous publication since 2011. Above, Cayupán brings together the unedited poem *Piedra Humana*, an ontological project that continues the path of the poet's previous works and is immersed in an "aesthetic of the sacred" that brings traditional Mapuche knowledge and types of speech into the present. He includes epew (mythical tales) and other ancestral canonical forms in which beings are one with the cosmos dissolving and fusing in the energies which they inhabit. This perspective is part of the art and literature of present day Mapuche, whether as a challenge to preserve and represent this mode of inhabiting the cosmos as a vital experience, or as cultural revitalization and/or political stand of cultural resistance.

Throughout his texts, Cayupán achieves a challenging and complex project, that writes into its core a cosmogenic narrative from the rakizuam Mapuche --ancestral traditional thinking-- which creates a transformative reality that expands from the rüme fütra kuifi, the time of origins, until it returns to itself in the events of the fantepu mew- the present. Between these axes, Cayupán maintains a constant movement without end. In this cosmic happening the poetic voice seeks to express how life transforms and how humankind goes through the world, establishing the immeasurable as a measure and border of all beings.

## Word

### I

It first dwelt in caves  
where the myth emerged  
it was the fire of every foundation  
domesticated heat  
Cloistered shadows  
danced naturally  
chasing away darkness

### II

It was a pillar of every fire pit  
rite of all mortals  
Indissoluble matter  
primary tool  
natural conjure  
Absolute clarity

### III

It deserted from silence  
It stripped its old garments off  
It paraphrased within a breath  
the first thing it said:  
- here is water  
flour and yeast  
(In other words: The Word)

### IV

Then the stone spoke harshly  
Filtered voices through wind  
strained its design  
Presage of becoming  
immortal light

V

Was the word perhaps  
continuation of fire  
and mediator of stones?  
Wherever you go  
you will find the word within you  
Sacred ceremony  
divine worship

VI

We are fire and earth still  
carved stone  
Word - People  
pilgrim of empty fields  
the earth our room  
The night finally became day  
transparency of all words  
light of future  
Path of humanity.

## Things... Its meanings

A person was just a single handful of rocks thrown to the ground  
that mystery of always being in the world  
searching for a meaning in things  
as if things give meaning to people  
The four seasons of life  
give a specific use for objects  
which become part of people with time  
expanding their way of conceiving the universe  
The newly made figures  
always look like the first light  
described by a prophet  
They began to name objects in a different way  
languages were born and thus crafts  
All things originated in the shadows  
The saddlemaker, for example, learned to write knife with his blood  
thus the craftsman sculpted the sad heart of the forest  
the blacksmith crushed his noble fists in the forge  
because shadow is the soul of things, ones own marrow  
I withdraw from time  
and I start a new one  
with my own way of interpreting things  
If destiny was to go back to the beginning  
naming things with the forefinger  
Then, people take  
what a life on earth takes  
in sprouting their seeds.

## **People are garments of ancient gods**

Shadows that are pushed to the ground  
with that bestiality that we do not comprehend  
they are not a premonition of another creation  
but auspice of our own existence  
Who do we stop being when we are born  
lighting up that mysterious hand?  
The gods, on their behalf, hid their shadows  
on immovable rocks  
The one who manages to move the mother rock  
also find the secrets of that species  
But gods extinguished when people emerged  
their deities were deposited in clay tombs  
Then the written word came  
next to the text of the forbidden fruit  
The fear of snakes were developed in remote memory  
in the first letter of the family tree  
that is why today people seek something that they have never lost  
but have been led to believe that they've misplaced it.

## **The Tree of Life**

The first path was a handful of rocks  
emerging from the earth  
where Man depended upon himself  
to give direction to his steps  
seeking the valley of life  
Upon discovering language  
he traced a map in the soil  
and in the same clay he wrote his history  
The tree of life  
is a path carved in the memory of Man  
where its wood shavings celebrate  
as they reunite with the early memory  
A tree founded upon the root of the Word  
where its trunk rises to the height of being  
A strappy well-built tree rising up to the universe  
Man is a path with no way out  
seeking his days without end  
On that same crossing  
the way grows longer and burns out within  
like a dull hand seeking the origin of the paternal light  
The tree that we seek each day is within us  
in the most intimate realm of our being.

## **The ceremony of each day**

The boy swallows his father as usual  
and it seems that every day  
the father comes out from the depths of that child  
to help knead the bread that the mother leaves in the oven  
because she wants to see that someone eats that ancient food  
placed on the recently set table  
That is the purest rite of passage from child to man  
Be swallowed from the guts  
and allow the father live inside his own son  
so that the past that remains in his memory is alleviated  
which is the origin of all family communion  
When one makes a pact      blood trembles  
how the spell reenacts  
because in the end each ceremony has its own time  
where people last as long as their family tree endures on Earth.



## **I Am Not Here Yet**

I am a wounded word  
lacking in language and space  
An unspeakable word  
without dictionary  
or homeland  
A word  
that did not find a human group  
to be spoken by  
A word unsuspected by any mouth  
In which era did we cease to be plants  
to incarnate the word  
matter and spirit  
naked, docile, humans?

## **The House in the Rock**

If I made this rock my home  
it was merely to discover the light that is born within her  
for in every home there is a lamp made of words  
that lights up with the beginning of each season  
I stopped to observe the light that emerges from the stone  
for in the eve of a man  
things are valued in a different way  
Upon speaking it, the light becomes more ancient  
for there is something within her that makes us susceptible  
upon seeing her through Man  
I see myself in the stone when I see her foundations  
because her light courses through the hands of the stonemason  
and transcends the efforts of those who raised her up  
with just one word written upon the earth  
This rock is the shadow of a place that does not exist  
a half closed door that illuminates the craggy knob  
in a manner that precedes the light  
When one looks at the beams with the eyes of another  
it is to make his household sturdy  
for from the roots of the rock is a roof sheltering clarity  
I walk around its outskirts seeking an answer  
that sign that we recognize from before birth  
and one feels some footsteps within  
such ancient tracks within himself  
it was as though he knew them by heart  
for those footsteps were made by his ancestors  
Someone calls to me through a mirror  
and this voice seems to approach  
but as it moves, it moves away within me  
When the mirror that was permanently in our house cracks  
the mystery that lies within it breaks apart as well  
for it is a cave of glass now living within the human genus  
Who but time rebuilds its walls?  
deepening it each time  
The time that scarcely passes is nothing more than a delayed present  
and the past that begins there is another layer of ash in the memory of Man  
because the house goes back to the origins of being.

## More about Cristian Cayupán

- Cristian Cayupán in the [Dialogo Project](#), Chile

## About Mabel García Barrera



She is an academic at the Universidad de la Frontera (“*the University of the Border*”), located in the city Temuco, Mapuche territory, in Chile. She is a State professor of Spanish, with a masters in literature and a degree in applied political sciences. She has investigated, written, and edited books and numerous articles about Mapuche literature and art in mainstream magazines.

## About the translators



Lorrie Jayne, a collaborator in *Siwar Mayu*, teaches Spanish, Portuguese, and Personal Narrative in the Languages and Literatures Department at University of North Carolina Asheville (USA). She lives with her husband and daughters in the Appalachian Mountains where she enjoys plants, people, and poetry.



Juan G. Sánchez Martínez grew up in Bakatá, Colombian Andes. He dedicates both his creative and scholarly writing to indigenous cultural expressions from Abiyala (the Americas.) His book of poetry, *Altamar*, was awarded in 2016 with the National Prize *Universidad de Antioquia*, Colombia. He collaborates and translates for *Siwar Mayu*. Recent work: [Muyurina y el presente profundo](#) (Pakarina/Hawansuyo, 2019); and *Cinema, Literature and Art Against Extractivism in Latin America. Dialogo 22.1* (DePaul University, 2019.)