Research Article

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Alberto Blest Gana: Four Chronicles and a Novel

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Abstract: Four chronicles written by Alberto Blest Gana between April and May 1862 in the newspaper *La voz de Chile*, months before the publication of his novel *Mariluán*, shed light on the close relationship between his production as chronicler and writer. Among the various *faits divers* discussed in the columns, the issue of a Mapuche delegation's arrival in Santiago to hold a *parlamento* with the government about border disputes arises. The oscillating attitude of the chronicler in the face of otherness and his prejudiced comments, which are at the same time full of doubts and perplexities, serve as an incentive for his composing a utopian fiction. This article aims to examine the connections in the relationship between Blest Gana chronicler and novelist to expand the reading possibilities of *Mariluán*.

Keywords: nineteenth-century Chilean literature, *indigenismo*, *Mariluán*, otherness

El Encuentro [The Meeting]

In April 1862, after a 500 km horse ride, a retinue of eighty Mapuche chiefs arrived in Santiago to discuss issues related to the border of their territory with *criollo* Chile. They had been summoned by the recently elected liberal president, José Joaquín Pérez, with the purpose of reaching a peaceful agreement on the territorial occupation of Araucanía. The official objective was to persuade the Mapuches to renounce some of their land and, in return, to be offered a commitment that would legally guarantee their rights, "particularly as it regarded the sale of those lands" (Leiva 92–93).[1] This essay will analyse the visit from the Mapuche delegation in Santiago through four of Blest Gana's chronicles. These describe the author's oscillating stance in the face of otherness which we also find integrated into his novel *Mariluán*, written only months afterward.

The frustrated November 1860 attempt of the Frenchman Orélie-Antoine de Tounens to proclaim himself king of Aracaunía with the intention of leading the Mapuche people's struggle for independence had put the Chilean government on alert, anxious to prevent national security conflicts in the region. The arrest of the French citizen occurred in January 1862, and from that moment on, the Chilean government decided that the vast southern region would be occupied in a concrete and strategic way.[2] Up until that point, the lands had been deemed to be of little economic value and had sparked relatively low interest from the Chilean *criollo* side. This was due to the official's ignorance of its true topography.

President Pérez had heeded the proposals of Colonel Cornelio Saavedra (Mayor of Arauco in those years), who insisted that it was necessary to move towards those untamed territories for international

1 Quotations of Blest Gana are given in Spanish and English. In other instances, quotations are in English only, with rare exceptions where Spanish and English are necessary for clarity.

2 For an updated account of Orélie-Antoine's controversial enterprise in Chile, see Jean-François Gareyte (2016).

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strategic purposes. To Saavedra's arguments was added the expansionary impulse that would mark Chilean border policy throughout the nineteenth century. The Saavedra project had three stages: advancing the border south, up to the Malleco River, through the construction of forts with a visible military presence; a land purchase plan (which in current terms would be defined as a state expropriation project) between the Bío-Bío and Malleco rivers, to ensure a non-indigenous population density in the area and re-founding the city of Angol; and third, a discrimination in land occupation to colonise those that provided the best quality and that could be easily defended (Bengoa 174–175).

The talks that preceded the *encuentro* had been mediated by Bernardino Pradel, an inhabitant of the border who spoke Mapudungun and who had participated in the indigenous uprisings of 1859 against the Montt government. Now he was acting as an interpreter and, in a first private meeting with the president, he disclosed the claims of those he represented:

> ... begin by fortifying some places in the Araucanian territory to be determined in due course. Then, create a special province in the indigenous territory while dividing it into a set number of departments with the governors of those departments being the chiefs themselves, who would then receive a state salary. Next, allow the young men from among the caciques to become public enforcers, also paid by the State, and who would serve to assert authority against those who could rise up or disown the government (Leiva 125).

The April 1862 meeting between the Mapuche chiefs and the Chilean government had little effect, since the agreement regarding indigenous rights over their lands (which was governed by a treaty on borders signed in 1793 with Spain) would be systematically violated by the Chilean government's "Pacificación de la Araucanía" [The Pacification of the Araucanía], which began precisely at the end of 1862 and concluded in practical terms towards the beginning of 1890.

During the weeks when the Mapuche leaders remained in Santiago, between April and May 1862, their presence provoked constant headlines and comments in newspapers and inspired conversations in gatherings and salons throughout the city. The newspaper *La voz de Chile* recorded the event through two of its columnists: Isidoro Errázuriz and Alberto Blest Gana. Errázuriz's articles discussed the terms in which the two *parlamentos* [official negotiations] between the delegation and the government representatives had been conducted, on Thursday, 24th April, and with President Pérez, on Friday, 2nd May. These comments are today privileged primary historiographic sources. Blest Gana's observations, however, were developed in a more general fashion, writing about the impact of the visit on the social space of Santiago. These chronicles have never been examined to date.

There are a series of studies and comments (Durán and Ramos; Valenzuela Van Treek; and Pinto Rodríguez, among others) on the importance of this historical meeting. They are based, for the most part, on documents assembled by Arturo Leiva in his book *El primer avance hacia la Araucanía. Angol. 1862*, who in turn found his sources in the reports that the meeting's mediator, Bernardino Pradel, and the aforementioned liberal Isidoro Errázuriz, filed at the time.

From April to July 1862, Blest Gana dedicated four chronicles specifically to this episode in his weekly *La voz de Chile* column, "Conversación del Sábado" [Saturday Conversation]. They are of enormous interest because they help us to explore and understand the writer's position on *la cuestión indígena* [the indigenous issue] more clearly. Further, they allow us to rethink the place that the novel *Mariluán*, published in eleven instalments between October and November of that same year, occupies in the same newspaper.

The Chronicles of Blest Gana

The corpus of Blest Gana's chronicles has been collected twice: partially in 1947 by José Zamudio, who did not include the author's collaboration for *La voz de Chile*; and a second time, in 1956, by Raúl Silva Castro, who published the material in its entirety as a supplement to *El Jefe de la familia* [the Family Patriarch], Blest Gana's only theatrical piece. Although his work as a columnist has not seen the light again, the significance of this data has been highlighted on more than one occasion, since Domingo Amunátegui Solar made the first retrospective look at the entire oeuvre in 1920, the year of the author's death. Following

Amunátegui Solar, Alone, Hernán Poblete Varas and others thought of the *artículos de costumbre* [vignettes of customs, manners] as preparations, *dibujos de detalles* [detail drawings], sketches for what he was going to develop later in his novels. Jorge Román-Lagunas lucidly underscores how Blest Gana's so-called "moderate realism," his political denunciation executed "in a minor tone," "his contained social criticism because it was uttered from within the system," could find traces, some type of origin, in some of these *artículos de costumbre* (605–606).

But what has not been sufficiently emphasised in Blest Gana studies is that his chronicle articles do not predate his years as a fiction writer. His exercise as a writer and a chronicler took place simultaneously, since his debut as a novelist in 1853, with *Una escena social* [A Social Scene]. Before the long hiatus of his diplomatic career, Blest Gana's life as writer of fiction and chronicles ran together for eleven years in a manner that we could view as alternate and discontinuous.

Considering the corpus of the author's twenty-one newspaper articles within the framework that they were written while he was launching his first fourteen novels, it becomes evident that there is a tight-knit interdependence between his articles and his fiction. It is not just a question of sketches or attempts at *pintura social* [social depictions]. Through these articles, it becomes possible to enrich our appreciation of the ideological support of all the author's work. Much of past criticism has relied on his two most obviously programmatic essays, "De los trabajos literarios" [On Literary Works], from 1859, and "La literatura chilena: algunas consideraciones sobre ella" [Chilean Literature: Some Considerations], from 1861. Reading the content of the chronicles carefully, we find that opinions and considerations arise with respect to political matters, moments of national contingency, *costumbres* and social practices, which strongly illuminate certain aspects of Blest Gana's poetics.

Throughout 1862, Blest Gana produced à la Balzac, frantically. Between April and July, he delivered the twelve columns of "Conversación del sábado" for *La voz de Chile*; published one article in September *in separata*, "Mudanzas de domicilio" [House removals/Home movers]; and in May, for *El correo del Domingo*, "Los retratos en tarjetas" [Portraits in Cards]. He also produced three novels for delivery in the same *La voz de Chile*: *La Venganza* [The Revenge], which appeared in three March issues; *Martín Rivas*, his most famous novel, between May and July; and *Mariluán*, published in eleven chapters between October and November. On top of this, we should also add his work as Jefe de Sección [Head of Section] in the Ministry of War, where he had been working since 1855.

The differences between the writer, the chronicler and the public official who wrote diplomatic correspondence are nonetheless obvious. The fact that Blest Gana ceased working on drafts for future novels once he assumed his job as a Chilean representative abroad demonstrates his intention to separate each one of his activities. Alone observed in 1840 that nothing would have prevented the author from pursuing his literary career while carrying out diplomatic duties, as many other writers had done. It is a question here of a personal decision that is made evident in the differentiation of tone between the chronicler commenting on daily life in mid-century Santiago and the narrative voice that we find in his work of fiction.

Blest Gana, the chronicler, maintains an ironic tone which is at the same time a deluded detachment. His style derives from two sources: on the one hand, it draws on the nineteenth-century French *chronique*, "a place of varieties, of curious facts and which is without sufficient relevance to appear in the serious sections of a newspaper" (Rotker 123). It also relies on an existing paradox figure from French journalism of the second empire which "allows not only for the reconciliation of opposites but also contains them in the same sentence, a sign of the insolubleness of the times and of a vast 'modern' joke" (Thérenty 149). Along with this, Blest Gana adopted yet another strategy from the French model: the oblique mode of delivery which permits commenting on a certain fact or circumstance while simultaneously alluding to another. What in France was a way to avoid State censorship made its way to Chile as a style feature.

The other prominent source comes from Spain. As Amunátegui Solar observed early on, Blest Gana's articles emulated the style of the Spaniard Mesonero Romanos, who was very much in vogue at the time in Latin America. Much of the influence of the Madrid chronicler can be appreciated in Blest Gana's elaborate observations of social groups, with a considerable amount of mischief, humour and irony. But the Chilean author does not present any evidence of a commitment to the portrayal of the city, which was revered by Mesonero Romanos. Instead, the voice of the chronicler expresses the appearance of an obvious

disenchantment in his observations and descriptions of the Santiago elite, which, incidentally, was part of the writer's own milieu. In his mind, it lacked social life, parties, gatherings, theatre, dance, and comedies. In an 1859 article in *La Semana*, he had already noted: "Lo que dura por aquí son los bostezos … Santiago es la ciudad más estúpida del globo" [What endures around here are yawns. Santiago is the stupidest city on the planet] (Blest Gana, *El jefe de la familia* 125–131).

In a current reading of these Blestganian chronicles, his effort to appear distant and ironic vis-à-vis an event, as well as his adopted *tono olímpico* and use of the *boutade*, seems artificial. The scope of topics addressed always revolves around the portrayal of *costumbre*s and the political scene. He observed these with a cynical spirit and remained deliberately non-committal, appealing to an imagined impartiality in his point of view. As his columns discussed *de todo un poco* [a bit of everything], the idea was not to inform but to entertain. In addition, as chronicles by definition relate generally to current events, it is not always easy to identify every allusion or individual from the nineteenth-century scene, and many now have fallen into oblivion.

There were twelve weekly chronicles published by *La voz de Chile*, the liberal newspaper owned by the brothers Manuel Antonio and Guillermo Matta, which circulated between 1862 and 1864. Beginning in 1861, Chilean liberalism had regained ground with the defeat of the Montt government and the victory of José Joaquín Pérez, who would remain in power for two terms. But it had been a rather conditional victory which had required alliances with conservatives and the wing of *pelucones*. Among young liberal letrados, this had produced mistrust in the effective conditions for change in the political and social arenas. This ironic distance marked the position of *La voz de Chile* and, in particular, the interventions of the chronicler Blest Gana in his Saturday columns, whose title defines the "conversational" and relaxed tone that animated them.

Blest Gana commented four times on the visit of the caciques entourage and the repercussions of their presence in Santiago. The hypothesis here is that this event is directly linked to the conception of the novel *Mariluán*, which would appear only months later. The questions raised in his observations during these four weeks, only seven months before publication of the novel, acquire more relevance when examined in light of our reading of the latter. Moreover, what is questioned in the chronicles takes shape and appropriates a voice in the novel. Since these Blestganian chronicles have not been critically examined up to this point, it seems essential to provide a detailed description of the few and specific sections in which the Mapuche theme emerges.

"Conversación del sábado." 19th April, 1862

Towards the end of this chronicle, we find the first mention of the issue with the announcement of the upcoming arrival of the retinue. The writing describes the uniqueness of the eighty caciques: "Asegúrase que los indios que están próximos a llegar son auténticos y representantes de las más ilustres familias de la comarca araucana" [Credible sources say that the *indios* who are about to arrive are authentic and representatives of the most illustrious families from the Arauco region] (Blest Gana, *El jefe de la familia* 230).

The general astonishment and the attitude itself of the chronicler amount to a major political issue. Except for one episode during the colony's existence, in 1772, *parlamentos* of this magnitude had never been held before with Mapuche leaders in Santiago. It was, as the chronicler notes, an exercise in "diplomacia de la *tierra* adentro" [*inland* diplomacy], which he used to put Santiago society in perspective: "… la sociedad de Santiago … espera impaciente la nueva visita y la celebra no sólo para satisfacer su curiosidad, sino como un progreso, pues ve que nuestras relaciones internacionales se van amoldando al gusto europeo, que dirime las más vitales cuestiones por medio de la diplomacia." [… Santiago's society… eagerly awaits the new visit and celebrates it not only to satisfy its curiosity, but as a sign of progress, since it sees that our international relations are being moulded to a European taste, which solves the most vital questions through diplomacy] (230–231).

Several things merit detailed attention here so that we may follow the thread in Blest Gana's reasoning through his later chronicles. The idea that the "comarca Araucana" [Arauco region] and its inhabitants are conceived as foreigners with whom one establishes international relations following a European model points to sentiments of otherness toward the indigenous people and also to an ongoing model of inspiration from overseas. The ironic tone, à la Mesonero Romanos, allows the narrator, without too much commitment on his part, to express opinions without depth which then land almost as criticisms. The humour relies on the type of reception that the chronicler proposes should be prepared for the caciques, despite the "escasez pecuniaria" [pecuniary shortage] of the Chilean government. He suggests that if by chance the caciques were to arrive in Santiago on Domingo de Cuasimodo (Catholic commemoration in effect to date, celebrated the Sunday following Easter), they could be led to believe that the festive rockets would be "señales de regocijo por su llegada" [signs of rejoicing for their arrival] (230). Behind these semi-humorous remarks lies the fact that the costs of the Mapuche visit would have been paid by the government, which had already been subject to criticism from conservatives and *pelucones* in the newspaper *El Ferrocarril*. The other noteworthy detail in the words of this chronicle is the allusion to the curiosity that the event aroused in Santiago's society. This topic will be developed in subsequent dispatches and will acquire a clear significance.

"Conversación del sábado." 26th April, 1862

The second chronicle records that the "Legación Araucana" [Arauco Legation] had already arrived and that it showed off "el frontispicio de su palacio en la no muy aristocrática calle de la Ollería" [the frontispiece of its palace in the not very aristocratic Street of Ollería] (237). From colonial times until 1864 (when it was renamed La Maestranza, based on a barrack that was installed there), the current Portugal Avenue housed different workshops and trades dedicated to the manufacture of domestic utensils and pottery, from which the name La Ollería derived (Vicuña Mackenna 13). The "not very aristocratic" passage alludes to an extremely stratified Santiago, one in which letrados (those who wrote the chronicles and those who read them) belonged to a narrow community perfectly described by Amunátegui Solar, around 1920:

> Los jóvenes de nuestro tiempo no pueden formarse una idea exacta de lo que era entonces la alta sociedad de Santiago. Timorata y orgullosa, estaba compuesta de un pequeño grupo de familias, en su mayor parte establecidas en las calles de Santo Domingo, las Monjitas, la Merced, Catedral, Compañía, Ahumada y Estado, alrededor de la Plaza, despreciativas de los que no tenían fortuna para vivir en el centro (26).
>
> [Young people of our time cannot form an exact idea of how Santiago's high society was then. Fearful and proud, it was made up of a small group of families, mostly established on the streets of Santo Domingo, Las Monjitas, La Merced, Catedral, Compañía, Ahumada and Estado, around the Plaza, contemptuous of those who did not have the wealth to live in the centre of town.]

Despite a childhood spent in the Alameda, in the vicinity of Santiago's "Olimpus," equidistant from the Ollería and the Plaza de Armas, Blest Gana lived in the house of his well-stocked in-laws when writing these chronicles, probably inside of the central perimeter. When discussing the *indígenas*, he reiterates time and again, and not by chance, the pathetic voracity of people's perceptions of them: "los curiosos de ambos sexos y de todos los colores políticos van a contemplarlos en su pintoresco desgreño" [curious people of both sexes and of all political colours go to contemplate them in their picturesque disarray] (Blest Gana, *El jefe de la familia* 237). However, considering the malleability of the chronicler's point of view, both the "not very aristocratic" aspect of the street and the "picturesque disarray" of the *indígenas* are assessments that seem to allude to the "childish curiosity" (as expressed below) of those who observed them. Of the four paragraphs dedicated to the matter, the last two deserve to be fully reproduced. Blest Gana had surely been digesting the Araucanía problem for some time, and a number of elements in that process can be assessed below:

> Y al paso que el vulgo satisface su pueril curiosidad, los aficionados al estudio de las razas les miran convencidos de que bajo sus toscos *chamantos* laten corazones a la moda de la época actual, puesto que conservan el sagrado amor a su *autonomía*, que Caupolicán y Lautaro les transmitieron por herencia.
>
> Bien puede suceder que los jefes y *allegados* de esta Legación ignoren lo que significa autonomía, por ser palabra de muy reciente usanza entre nosotros; pero allí está su historia para atestiguar que si no conocen la palabra, porque no leen nuestra prensa diaria, saben pelear con denuedo por la cosa, que es lo principal en estos tiempos de autonomías flacas amenazadas por gordas autonomías (238).
>
> [And while the common people satisfy their childish curiosity, fans of the study of races look at them convinced that under their rough *chamantos* their hearts beat in the fashion of the present times, since they preserve the sacred love of their *autonomía*, that Caupolicán and Lautaro transmitted to them by inheritance.
>
> It may well happen that the chiefs and *allegados* of this Legation ignore what autonomy means, as it is a very recent word among us; but their history is there to testify that if they do not know the word, because they do not read our daily press, they know how to fight courageously for *la cosa*, which is primary in these times of thin autonomies threatened by fat autonomies.]

Here we already have in embryo the ideological scheme which Blest Gana will use in the characterisation of his protagonist Fermín Mariluán, a fervent reader of *La Araucana*, from where he has inherited his willingness to fight courageously for *la cosa*, that is, the autonomy of his people. In addition, the gaze of the chronicler who defines himself as a "fan of the study of races," looks beyond the rough *chamantos*, beyond the barbarian appearance, to detect the actuality of the political purposes of those "guests of indomitable lineage" (237). It is important to bear in mind that, as Arturo Leiva observes, "The Araucanos were then the most peripheral and marginal in Chile. And to a great extent this determines the very nature of the Araucano problem. Only sectors as peripheral as themselves, that is, the border social strata, would understand their problem" (124). In a contradictory fashion, the text plays with the idea that what makes them more current is, precisely, the legacy that they preserve from their mythical ancestors. But there is more. A sense of otherness makes it possible to appreciate those who dress differently and those who manage another language by associating them with what is known: "under their rough *chamantos* their hearts beat in the fashion of the present times." Finally, a rhetorical strategy is formulated that consists of mirroring the desire for autonomy of the Mapuche people with the desire for autonomy of the rest of the Hispanic American people. This principle is at the base of the novel's discussion.

"Conversación del sábado." 3rd May, 1862

In this article, the "asunto araucano" [the Araucano issue] is given more space than in the previous one. Before continuing his commentary on the visit, Blest Gana discusses the controversial case of Orélie-Antoine de Tounens, about whom the chronicler will deploy extreme sarcasm and irony. This results from an article in *l'Opinion Nationale*, a Parisian newspaper, which in those days praised the enterprise of the self-proclaimed *rey araucano*. During the weeks of the Mapuche delegation in Santiago, Orélie was imprisoned in the Araucanía territory, awaiting extradition to France. Blest Gana makes it clear through the cartoon that he considers "el príncipe de la figura melenuda" [the prince of the hairy figure] (*El jefe de la familia* 249) to be delusional, thereby concurring with public opinion. This will be basically the same position he will maintain man y years later, in 1873, as a Chilean diplomat in Paris, when Orélie again threatened to travel to Araucanía. The letter-reports to Adolfo Ibañez, the Minister of Foreign Relations and Colonisation, during the Zañartu government (1871–1875), show the manoeuvres that Blest Gana was willing to deploy as plenipotentiary ambassador with the sole aim of preventing that trip (Blest Gana, *Epistolario* I, 497–577).

But in this chronicle, Blest Gana's prerogative was mundane, and this allowed him to abruptly leave the whole Arauco issue up in the air and put "esta cuestión internacional" [this international matter] (*El jefe de*

la familia 250) in the hands of specialists, hardly suspecting that it would be himself who, years later, would have to deal with it officially.

The text then turns its attention to the stay of the Mapuche caciques in Santiago. Through the vehicle of paradox, mentioned above, Blest Gana accounts for what ideology cannot resolve and thus transforms contradictions into figures of style. The homogenizing and provincial spirit of the Chilean letrado is confronted with an indigenous alterity in a factual way. It is no longer a question of sculpting an *Ercillesco* hero in royal octaves according to Renaissance patterns. In the insipid capital scene, we see caciques of flesh and blood with their unusual clothes and long hair, in whose profiles "no se divisa ningún parentesco con los Adonis y Narcisos … ni podrían representar el papel del lindo don Diego, ni de otro galán por el estilo" [there is no kinship with the Adonis and Narcissus types … nor could they play the role of the beautiful Don Diego, nor of another heartthrob like that] (251–252). The "ugliness" of these newcomers or, as he himself relativises later in the text, what "we call ugliness," was inscribed within a Western aesthetic standard. In a humorous and somewhat forced tone, the chronicler characteristically insinuates that "las personas del bello sexo en estado interesante" [people of the fair sex in an interesting state] (pregnant women) confronted with "lo poco arreglado de su físico a lo que por acá llamamos belleza" [(the caciques') poorly groomed physiques compared to what we call beauty here] (252) could suffer some unfortunate mishap, alluding to the danger of a miscarriage. What today resonates dissonantly like a prejudicial joke in bad taste was plausible in the middle of the nineteenth century in a weekly chronicle written by one of the promising writers of the national scene, in a newspaper of liberal tendency. As Leiva puts it well: "At this stage in the country's history, hardly anyone would have considered the indigenous people on an equal footing. direct contact, personal relationships with the *indios* was not really favoured" (123). Up to the twentieth century, we continue to find these types of emphatic statements. In fact, in 1920, the illustrious liberal and rector of the Universidad de Chile, Domingo Amunátegui Solar, complained about the lack of verisimilitude of the romantic couple formed by the *indígena* and the criolla in *Mariluán*, as follows: "Los araucanos con sus toscas figuras y sus pasiones salvajes, en vez de atraer, causaron siempre aversión a las mujeres de sangre europea. Y así lo comprueba la historia. El soldado español nunca tuvo dificultad para encontrar concubinas indígenas. Pero el araucano solo por la violencia hizo concebir a mujeres españolas" [The Araucanians with their rough figures and their savage passions, instead of attracting, have always inspired aversion in women of European blood. And so history proves it. The Spanish soldier never had difficulty finding indigenous concubines. But the Araucanian could make Spanish women conceive only through violence] (47–48).

Discussion of this particular social issue could occupy entire libraries of anthropological studies. Here, we can only emphasise that the essential oscillation in the chronicler's discourse is a means of accounting for a problem that was posed to him, as early as 1862, as an aporia. It is important to verify that the ideological combination of *belleza*/*fealdad* [beauty/ugliness] was perceived as a problem and that Blest Gana handled it with an oscillating movement, that of a paradox, which was permitted by the medium of the chronicle, as we have already seen: "… en medio de esta que, tal vez por un error de apreciación, nosotros llamamos fealdad, brilla en todos ellos cierta belleza relativa: la de la altivez del corazón y del valor incontrastable del alma" [… perhaps due to an error of appreciation, in the midst of that which we call ugliness, a certain relative beauty shines in all of them: that of the haughtiness of their hearts and the undeniable value of their souls] (*El jefe de la familia* 252). Months later, Blest Gana would publish his novel where, with a different tone and treatment, but still in an oscillating way, he imagined the possibility of an interracial love affair and where the acculturated Mapuche would be described without any prejudice: "su cara era simpática y elegantes sus maneras" [his face was nice and his manners were elegant] (*Mariluán* 5).

Roberto Castillo Sandoval speaks of an "oscillating characterisation" of the *indígena* in Chilean literature and historiography, which starts with the treatment that Ercilla gave to his Araucanians in *La Araucana*. On one hand, there is an "undeniable idealization" and, on the other, we find defects coined by the ideology of barbarism (238). This is an ideology inherited by Blest Gana, and the importance of these texts written for *La voz de Chile* lies precisely in those uncomfortable observations that the chronicler perceives and represents as paradox.

The pendulum of contradictions in this vision of the world can also be observed in another passage where the chronicler describes the sensation caused within the population of Santiago by the delegation's

procession towards La Moneda, on 2nd May: "Después, formados en la plazuela de este edificio, sostuvieron con impertérrita calma las curiosas miradas del gentío que los rodeó. Ellos impasibles, parecían desdeñar a la turba que daba prueba de su cultura observándolos cual si fuesen animales montaraces" [Later, aligned in the square of this building, they held the curious glances of the crowd that surrounded them with imperturbable calm. Impassive, they seemed to disdain the mob which gave proof of its own culture by observing them as if they were wild animals] (*El jefe de la familia* 251). The gaze rests on the curious attitude of the "crowd" and the "mob," provincial and uneducated, in front of the newcomers, who in turn show disdain toward them with impassivity. This reinforces an image that places one and the other in completely different orbits. The *descompás* of confronting otherness works here in both directions. Thus, the Mapuches paid no heed to their surroundings, "Silenciosos y estoicos, ni miraban a los curiosos, ni se fijaban en la estatua de Portales" [Silent and stoic, they neither looked at the curious nor did they look at the statue of Portales] (251). The montage suggests a pathos that brings the reader closer to the situation of those men, surrounded and observed as if they were "wild animals." Their stoic silence contrasts with the noise and hubbub of the mob and the crowd that, although unmentioned, can be assumed. That scene will be the starting point of the last chronicle.

"Conversación del sábado." 10th May, 1862

In the days that follow, the town "sigue recreándose con la vista de los araucanos" [continues to entertain itself with the sight of the Araucanos] (257). Starting with the first instalment, an idea has been reiterated that the presence of the group of caciques functions as a spectacle, a diversion that has come to animate a yawning, uneducated and curious Santiago. For their part, the actors of the said pantomime circulate through the streets "observando, pero no admirando, las maravillas de la civilización" [observing, but not admiring, the wonders of civilisation] (257).

One of the Mapuches, the *lenguaraz* [interpreter] Pedro Cid, has been imprisoned during the delegation's stay in Santiago. Blest Gana does not go into detail, but we know that Cid had been one of the *montoneros* during the 1859 levies. A sibling of one of his victims claimed Cid's arrest, despite the fact that "he had already been pardoned under the country's valid amnesty law" (Leiva 129). According to the explicit interpretation of the chronicler, the imprisonment of one of the members of the entourage was received as a betrayal by those who "han venido a pedir justicia" [have come to ask for justice]: The event "les ha hecho ver que no todo lo que se les dijo al traerlos era verdad" [has made them see that not everything that was said to them when they were brought to the Capital was true] (*El jefe de la familia* 257). Maintaining the phlegmatic tone that characterises his voice, these impressions leave no doubt about Blest Gana's sympathy for the "foreigners," although the text does not necessarily emphasise this fact.

The brief and final comment culminates with a new display that is somewhat contrived and which contains humorous overtones on the gifts that the government offers the delegation as a form of compensation for the injury. The *criollo* interlocutors try to appease the spirits of the "huéspedes de la tierra" [guests of the land] with suits and clothes of *garante* colour [red], deploying a Frenchism that is transcribed in italics and which provides an ironic commentary on the government's behaviour, following imported diplomatic rules. The result of these efforts is also ridiculed by Blest Gana who ends his section by discussing the bad southern weather in those days.

Nothing else about this historical encounter is to be found in later chronicles. Nothing about the departure of the entourage or about the conclusions were reached, as if the matter had suddenly evaporated, without further ado. But the deep impressions that the event aroused in the writer's mind led him to write and publish a novel only months later. On the novel's horizon, then, these chronicles, the visit of the caciques to Santiago, and prior and subsequent events all gravitate together. In fact, preparations for the Chilean army's advances towards the border, at the end of 1862, began during those months.

The Novel. October–November, 1862

In *Mariluán*, tragedy is linked to a love plot that is typical in Blest Gana. The Mapuche hero is attractive ("su cara era simpática"). Unlike the members of the royal entourage mentioned in the chronicle, his ways have become westernised to the point that he conquers the heart of the young *criolla* Rosa Tudela "desde la primera visita" [from his first visit] (*Mariluán* 9). We could perceive a willingness in the writer's mind to imagine the possibility of a utopian solution to what had actually been lost. Clearly, his way out of the conflict was circumscribed by nineteenth-century liberal ideology, but it is nonetheless very far from the total incomprehension of the *indígena* otherness that Sarmiento demonstrated, for example. At the risk of not attracting readers, what was commented on from a distance in the space of the chronicle became assumed in the short novel, leaving it largely overlooked until a century and a half later.

We are far from claiming that Blest Gana was a defender of the Mapuche cause, which would be surprising in an author whose low profile did not make him an open defender of any cause. What is evident, however, is his ability to give life to the ethnic-racial conflict that was beginning to assume a higher profile in Chilean society. But not in the way that it has been handled until now, as a subject that was rather "in the air" and that Blest Gana picked up intuitively. The novel is not as out there in the open, without support, as has been thought. The author's comments in the press months before show how the conflicts that arose from the encounter between the *sociedad criolla* and the Mapuche culture in southern Bío-Bío affected him, to such an extent that he decided to develop and embody them in a fiction that compiles their most contradictory aspects and proclaims them loudly in its tragic resolution. In fact, as in *Durante la Reconquista*, the tragic end is fruitful: the lives of the two lovers are sacrificed to an ideal of freedom and justice. This point has already been developed by Gilberto Triviños in his reading of *Mariluán*, which clearly illuminates the novel's contradictory scaffolding and lack of resolution.

Nothing appears more evident than the affiliation of the ideological structure of *Mariluán* with *La Araucana*. This literary relationship comes through from the first sentence of the novel: "La indómita energía de la raza inmortalizada por los cantos de Ercilla, brillaba en los ojos de Fermín Mariluán" (5) [The indomitable energy of the race immortalised by the verses of Ercilla, shone in Fermín Mariluán's eyes]. Roberto Castillo Sandoval has revealed how the epic poem, at the base of the construction of Chilean identity, has, despite a long tradition of readings and interpretations, always contained a "tense ideological equation" which, to justify the Conquest, consists of depicting the *indio* simultaneously as an ideal and a barbarian:

> ... the first incorporation of the figure of the Araucano to the idea of patria in Chile contains neither pure idealization nor denigration, but rather an oscillating adjudication of idealism and barbarism. In a manner that will deeply mark a *visión criolla* of the Araucano, Ercilla oscillates between presenting the *indios* as an ideal and characterising them as being capable of extreme abjection and irrationality; between the one incarnated in the figure of Caupolicán, strong, serene and heroic, and that of Tucapel, violent, angry and fierce (although no less brave). A dispassionate reading should not ignore the fact that this undeniable idealisation has as its constant and systematic counterpart, the homologation of the Araucano as a barbarian and as an enemy (238–239).

This ambivalence in the characterisation of the *indio* will migrate to Oña (*El Arauco domado*) and will be a component of the work by Francisco Nuñez de Pineda and Bascuñán (*El cautiverio feliz*), as the study by Castillo Sandoval shows. Blest Gana will inherit it too. In *Mariluán*, the virtues of the *indio mítico* become embodied in the civilised Fermín, while the demonic and barbarous features of the violent Araucano are incorporated into the fierce Peuquilén. This ambivalence in the presentation of the *indio* does not occur only in these two opposing characters; it is also found in the narrator's division that oscillates between the exaltation of the *indígena*s and the affirmation of their intrinsic and indomitable barbaric nature. So much so that Triviños was able to confirm, in his lucid but somewhat excessive reading, what the critics of "modern tradition" considered practically unanimously: the ambiguous and contradictory character of *Mariluán* (5). Likewise, Ariel Antillanca and César Loncón have read the novel along this same line of conflict between opposites.

We must also consider, however, that following its bourgeois tendencies, this nineteenth-century novel moves towards the display of a *criollo* universe where the ubiquity of a barbarism/civilisation binomial is denounced. Whereas the virtues of ethics and courage are cultivated in the Mapuche hero's co-assisting characters (Rosa Tudela and Juan Valero), their antagonists (Rosa's brother, Mariano Tudela, and uncle, Damián Ramillo) fully embody the sort of baseness that is produced by racist prejudices and capitalist usury. The narration states that the likes of Mariano and Damián belong to a specific kind of individual:

> ... una clase de traficantes muy numerosa y antigua en la frontera de Arauco. Los bienes de fortuna... provenían de convenios fraudulentos hechos con los indios... [Ellos pertenecían] a la escuela, muy numerosa en todas partes, de hombres positivos que encaminan todas sus acciones al único fin que consideran serio en la existencia: el de ganar plata (Blest Gana, *Mariluán* 13).
>
> [... a very large and old type of trafficker along the Arauco border. Their monetary assets. came from fraudulent agreements made with the *indios*. (They belonged) to a school, very numerous everywhere, of positive men who direct all their actions towards a single goal in their existence which they consider to be serious: that of making money.]

In the composition of these characters, Blest Gana displays a deep knowledge of the cultural and economic dynamics that characterised life on the border in those times. These differed substantially from those practiced in the capital (Leiva 131–132). Moreover, we must consider that the hand of capitalism had by this time penetrated all parts of the planet, including the Arauco region, where "making money" had already become a fundamental premise. With very few exceptions, this is one of the underlying forces in all of the Blestganian production.

The characters in the novel, standing for their beliefs, combine their positions into two opposing groups within a binary scheme typical of the genre: On one side, are Fermín Mariluán, his brother Cayo, his friends Caleu and Juan Valera and his beloved Rosa Tudela. On the other, we find the terrible Peuquilén together with Mariano Tudela and Damián Ramillo. What determines the places of the characters on the novel's Manichean board goes beyond their racial differences and actually surpasses them.

Within the scheme of the internal dynamics of the plot, Fermín Mariluán's project – fighting courageously for *la cosa* – fails. In his reflections upon the ideals expressed in Mapudungun and "translated" by the narrator, we discover everything that had been omitted by Blest Gana in his chronicles, written only months before. As we have already observed, the content of the Mapuche demands during their 1862 meeting with the Chilean government was archived in the reports published by Isidoro Errázuriz and by the mediator Bernardino Pradel. The writer was thus able to research them and transform them into his hero's own *parlamento*:

> El fin a que aspiro es el siguiente: que el Gobierno de Chile reglamente la internación de sus súbditos en el territorio de nuestros padres; que las autoridades nos presten su amparo, comprometiéndonos nosotros a respetarlas; que nuestros hermanos sean devueltos a sus hogares, y que se nombren tribunales que oigan los reclamos que tenéis que hacer contra los que os han despojado de vuestras tierras (Blest Gana, *Mariluán* 49–50).
>
> [The purpose to which I aspire is the following: that the Government of Chile regulate the internment of its subjects in our ancestors' territory; that the authorities lend us their protection, and we commit ourselves to respecting them; that our brothers be returned to their homes, and that courts be appointed to hear you on the claims you must make against those who have dispossessed you of your lands.]

Placed in the midst of his comments on the weekly *faits divers*, the chronicler's somewhat dismissive and ironic outlook on the Mapuche visit to the capital during the months of April/May gives way to a tragic perspective on the Chilean indigenous situation in the October/November novel of that same year.

It is true that the novel's events are set in 1833, and that Fermín's father was inspired by Francisco Mariluán, a cacique from the plains who played an important role in the episodes of the so-called *Guerra a muerte* [War to the Death], especially in the final agreements that allowed for the establishment of at least an appearance of peace in the region (Vicuña Mackenna 503). We should not forget, however, that as a dedicated disciple of Walter Scott, historic distancing was a resource utilised by Blest Gana in all his novels. This allowed him to move away from a narrative contingency and supposedly establish an objective

distance. The thirty-year interval between the events of the novel and the moment of its writing highlights the problem's permanence and its projection as a dilemma into the future.

Fermín's restorative project is confronted by, and clashes with, the economic interests of unscrupulous *criollos* who have found an ally in a libidinous Araucano who is also obsessed by the filthy lucre; facing these obstacles, a just war conceived by a *mapuche aculturado* (and, therefore, also convinced of a civilising ideal) cannot be launched. There are barely any accounts of battles, apart from a carefully described brief confrontation that takes place during the night, to display the strength and cunningness of the Mapuche warriors.

In 1920, in the article discussed above, Amunátegui Solar concluded his criticism of the protagonist's characterisation by stating that "el retrato de Mariluán [era] completamente falso" [the portrait of Mariluán (was) completely false] (470). In 1961, Manuel Rojas would return to that same statement in his introduction to a Blestganian anthology ("El personaje es más falso que Judas").[3] In light of what he perceived to be a mediocre work, Rojas even suggested that *Mariluán* and several other early Blest Gana compositions were mere *saldos* of writings that the author should have left behind. At a time when the weight of nineteenth-century realism still felt like a burden, Rojas had little patience for a "falsifying" construction of the *indígenas*, based on the image of the *indio* from Ercilla's *La Araucana*, which was understood as an ideal. The author of *Hijo de ladrón* reacted to what he considered to be stereotypes and excesses of "verbiage" and romantic composition.

Based on a fairly eclectic range of reviews (before Amunátegui Solar, there was also Pedro Nolasco Cruz in 1908 and Raúl Silva Castro came afterwards in 1955), it is well-known that negative judgments on the novel would persist. In 1981, however, John Ballard deployed new tools for evaluating nineteenth-century literature and thereby claimed the novel's place in the sun as a well-executed example of Balzacian realism. The utopia of a peaceful and just solution to the conflicts between Mapuches and *criollos* was tragically pitted against its historical impossibility. Ballard is correct in stating that "the historical facts surrounding the publication of the novel and which are undoubtedly evident in the immediate narration, clearly demonstrate the progressive marginalisation of the *indios*" (8).

Mariluán's critical ostracism, evidently, does not lie in "errors" of verisimilitude or structure, which, moreover, are not characteristics of this novel only. Several critics simply ignored it, including Eliodoro Aztorquiza in 1920 and Alone in 1955. It seems to me that the elimination of the novel from the Blestganian spectrum should be researched within the mechanisms of the system of reception, the same ones that elevated *Martín Rivas* to the pantheon of the Chilean literary canon, as "the" nineteenth-century novel par excellence.

Readings of *Mariluán* through the lens of cultural studies have ascribed a racist bent to the novel claiming that it embraces an *exterminio* intent. Blest Gana would have written it, from this perspective, as reinforcement for a civilising idea that supposes either the expulsion of the Araucano barbarians from the national territory or their definitive acculturation. This would be tied to the project outlined by the writer himself in his 1861 speech, in which he affirmed that literature was in the service of the civilising progress of the nation. It seems to me that when criticism emanates from a general cultural concept, the result is that various levels of understanding of the literary phenomenon become confused, leaving the impression that the following three concepts are inseparable from each other even as they actually merit separate consideration: the modes of a text's reception throughout history; the author's explicit vision in his manifesto; and the work itself, with its internal drive, full of contradictions. We know that in art, the equation between intentionality and product does not occur arithmetically – so much so that Marx exemplified the contradictions and perversions of the nineteenth-century capitalist world based on acute observations that he found in the oeuvre of a conservative and sometimes reactionary author, Balzac.

3 Rojas's statement means literally "The protagonist is more false than Judas." Rojas was not suggesting the impossibility of Rosa and Fermín's romantic relationship. He was criticising the full attributes of the character: "tocaba la guitarra y cantaba tiernas canciones de amor, poseyendo además 'una letra elegante;' enamorado, soldado de Lircay y lector apasionado de don Alonso de Ercilla" [he played the guitar and sang tender love songs. He was also endowed with elegant handwriting; a lover, a soldier of Lircay and a passionate reader of don Alonso de Ercilla] (19).

The problem of the integration of indigenous people in Latin American literature goes back to the times when Guamán Poma de Ayala, at the Spaniards' arrival during the Inca period, wrote in a hybrid language, already a victim of linguistic, religious, and cultural syncretism. The same happened, even more intensely, with the Inca Garcilaso, a child of two ethnic lines whose work proposed a solution that he translated into an *armonía desgarrada* [torn harmony].[4] The conflict remains open to the present. The plan of Blest Gana's protagonist, as he conceives it, does not come across as any less contradictory: a victory for his people liberated without any bloodshed; a program of acculturation for the *indios* led by an acculturated Mapuche; sovereignty over usurped land which had been ceded by the *criollos*; and finally, his union with a *criolla* woman, which would mean the *mestizaje* and westernisation of their offspring. What is necessary to consider here is that, despite these aporias, the novel benefited from what was occurring at the time in Santiago to proclaim out loud what was barely hinted at in his "Conversación del Sábado:"

> Soy araucano, y no puedo mirar indiferente lo que sufren los araucanos: poner fin a esos sufrimientos, colocando a los indios en situación de hacerse oír del Gobierno, he aquí mi ambición ('*...la comitiva de los que han venido a pedir justicia*'). Mas no podrán obtener la reparación y la justicia que merecen si no se presentan fuertes y terribles. Con el fuerte se trata y al débil se le oprime ('*saben pelear con denuedo por la cosa, que es lo principal en tiempos de autonomías flacas amenazadas por gordas autonomías*'). Yo he querido salvarlos de esa opresión y que se les mire como a hermanos ('*...la turba daba muestras de su cultura observándolos como si fuesen animales montaraces*') y no como a un pueblo enemigo del cual se pueden sacar esclavos (111).
>
> [I am Araucano, and I cannot look indifferently at the suffering of the Araucanos: here is my ambition, to put an end to that suffering, placing the *indios* in a position to make themselves heard by the Government ('*... the retinue of those who have come to ask for justice*'). But they will not be able to obtain the reparation and justice they deserve if they are not strong and fierce. The strong are dealt with and the weak are oppressed ('*they know how to fight courageously for la cosa, which is primary in these times of thin autonomies threatened by fat autonomies*'). I have wanted to save them from that oppression and that they may be seen as brothers ('. *the mob which gave proof of its own culture by observing them as if they were wild animals*') and not as an enemy people from which slaves can be taken.]

Turning the words of Triviños into my own, I insist with him: "Reread me, responds a novel that has been (badly) read: carefully analyse all of the protagonist's speeches" (12). The critic, originally from Concepción in Southern Chile, carried out the exercise of putting together all the "narrative fugues" found in the passages where the voice of the *indio* is heard and where testimonies of otherness reveal themselves as indestructible and sovereign.

Reviewing the weekly instalments, we clearly sense the echoes of the perplexities collected in these *parlamentos*. The medium of the chronicle, by its very nature, did not allow the author the same freedom he had in his fiction, which we can discern in *Mariluán*. The intuited contradictions could be exposed in the novel in a much more acute way. Dealing with contemporary issues only, with its focus on a solitary reader, the narration could open the field for a richer and more complex debate without having to confront the voices of public opinion immediately. The result of Blest Gana's effort is reflected in a feeling that reverberates in our times. Long after our reading has finished, we deeply sense how the dilemma of the Araucanía cries out for a solution that has not yet arrived.

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4 The concept of *armonía desgarrada* originated with Antonio Cornejo Polar.

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