

THE LANGUAGE OF SONGS IN PEDRO LEMEBEL'S *CRÓNICAS*

EL LENGUAJE DE LAS CANCIONES EN LAS CRÓNICAS DE PEDRO LEMEBEL

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Abstract

In Lemebel's *crónicas* we can find countless allusions to songs, included both intertextually and paratextually. Some studies engaged with this topic have focused either on the familiar component behind the lyrics, the role of songs in the recuperation of memory or the biographic factor behind the musical works. However, an aspect that still requires attention is how songs align with the author's written discourse. Is the narrator's voice independent from the speaker's voice in the lyrics alluded? Are they connected? If so, how is this articulated in the writer's literature and what purpose does it serve? Drawing on popular music, cultural identity, and affect theory, this article analyses four *crónicas* by Lemebel included in two of his late publications: *Serenata cafiola* and *Háblame de amores*, seeking to demonstrate that a close analysis of these songs would contribute to reaching a fuller understanding of the writer's discourse if accurately interpreted.

Keywords: Lemebel, songs, *crónica*, affect, cultural competence.

Resumen

En las crónicas de Lemebel podemos encontrar innumerables alusiones a canciones, incluidas tanto a nivel intertextual como paratextual. Algunos estudios abocados a este ámbito se han enfocado en el componente familiar, el factor biográfico, así como también en la recuperación de memorias estimuladas por referencias musicales. De todos modos, un tema pendiente aún es el análisis de las letras de las canciones en sus crónicas. ¿Es la voz del narrador del texto escrito independiente de la voz del narrador de la canción? ¿Cómo se articulan estas referencias y qué propósito buscan? Con base en teorías de los afectos, música popular, e identidad cultural, este artículo analizará cuatro crónicas de Lemebel incluidas en dos de sus publicaciones tardías: *Serenata cafiola* y *Háblame de amores*. Se intentará demostrar que una lectura detallada de las canciones en las crónicas podría contribuir a una comprensión más acuciosa del discurso literario.

Palabras claves: Lemebel, canciones, *crónica*, afectos, competencia cultural.

Songs are an essential component in Lemebel's *crónicas*, with lyrics that are cited in his literature both intertextually and paratextually. Some scholarly studies engaged with the writer's articulation of songs, have emphasised their use as a strategic way to approach the reader given the familiarity they evoke (Benadava; Party and Achondo). Others have focused on the way they contribute to activating memories (Campuzano¹; Mateo del Pino), while a few more have emphasised the biographic component behind those lyrics (Party and Achondo; Mateo del Pino), analysing the writer's portrayal of popular singers in his composition. Whereas all these studies have proposed relevant concepts to better understand this interesting mixture, an aspect that remains unexplored is how the language of songs aligns with the author's written discourse. Is the narrator's voice independent from the speaker's voice in the lyrics alluded? Are they connected? If so, how is this articulated in the writer's literature and what purpose does it serve? This article will aim at answering these questions by analysing four *crónicas* from Lemebel's late productions *Serenata cafiola* and *Háblame de amores*, where song lyrics are intriguingly embedded into the literary texts.²

This article is divided into four sections. The first one provides a brief contextualisation of how musical references have historically been part of Latin American literature. It also pays special attention to the work of Mexican writer Carlos Monsiváis (1938-2010), an author whose style was influential to Lemebel. The second part concentrates on how some academic works, to date, have studied the articulation of songs in the Chilean author's literature, proposing relevant concepts that help to explain his unique artistic strategy. We particularly concentrate on Daniel Party and Luis Achondo's description of songs as a *proceso de seducción*, as well as Bettina Campuzano's and Ángeles Mateo del Pino's shared interpretation of musical memories as a *telón de fondo*.

The third and fourth parts are dedicated to analysing the role of songs in Lemebel's *crónicas*, with texts that connect to pieces popularised by the bands/singers Los Jaivas, La Sonora de Tommy Rey, Alfredo Zitarrosa and Luis Aguilé. On one hand, part three concentrates on the relevance of songs as a language that interprets people's cultural identity, proposing that they are utilised by the author as a social interpellation, given their presence in Chile's collective imaginary. On the other hand, part four analyses how romantic songs are included in Lemebel's love stories and how they contribute to enhancing the reader's emotional response to the literary text. As a whole, this analysis draws on Popular

¹ A study by Campuzano that offers similar conclusions is "Trazar genealogías: Memoria de género y cancionero latinoamericano en la crónica urbana de Pedro Lemebel." *Textos Híbridos*, vol. 6, 2018, pp. 1-18.

² Note of clarification: This article does not comprise the radio work of Pedro Lemebel, given that such field would require a completely different theoretical approach. For more information on this area, see: Mateo del Pino, Ángeles. "Un cielo en un infierno cabe: Cancionero de Pedro Lemebel." *La vida imitada. Narrativa, performance y visualidad en Pedro Lemebel*, Iberoamericana Vervuert, 2020, pp. 265-285; and, Sierra Rivera, Judith. "Los recuerdos de Perlas y Cicatrices: Misivas radiales de Pedro Lemebel por la memoria en el Chile de los noventa." *Revista Cupey*, 2006, pp. 15-18.

Music theory (Frith; Bicknell; DeNora), Cultural Identity theory (Bourdieu; Garretón; Larraín) and Affect theory (Massumi; Hogan, "Fictions", *What Literature*, "Affect Studies"; Armstrong).

Ultimately, this article seeks to demonstrate that Lemebel's articulation of songs in his literature responds to a strategic purpose. It proposes that lyrics are embedded in his composition for specific reasons, fascinatingly disguised, expecting a culturally competent reader to decipher them. This would be possible by contrasting the meaning of both pieces song and text, an interpretive action that would arguably provide a complete and more accurate understanding of his work.

Musical references in Latin American Literature

The articulation of musical references in Latin American literature is vast. If we go back in time, the first allusions that we can identify will probably be found in colonial literature.³ However, if we pay attention to more recent publications, we will recognise intriguing references in Cuban literature, particularly in the works of Alejo Carpentier⁴ and Severo Sarduy,⁵ who used to incorporate musical topics in their texts in varied forms. Likewise, this phenomenon is also visible in Puerto Rican literature, where the rhythms *guaracha* and *bolero* were often cited not only as the types of dance and music that characters identified with, but also as a way to mimic how people interacted with each other, thus metaphorically representing the division of Latin American societies (Aparicio 74).⁶

³ For example, in *Viaje por el norte de Bolivia* (1853), British medic and chronicler Hugh Algernon Weddell describes the instruments, outfits and music that indigenous people in Bolivia played while participating in local ceremonies. A common characteristic of this manuscript is the lack of rigorousness in the writer's depiction of cultural traditions: "Weddell nos describe las danzas indígenas que pudo presenciar en las calles de la ciudad de La Paz, su música y sus vestimentas, pero nunca menciona los nombres con los que éstas eran conocidas en el ámbito urbano" (Soux 113). By stating that locals played "una especie de flautín" and "flautas de pan de tres tubos," the writer showed his lack of interest in deeply engaging with Bolivian popular traditions, a certainly common attitude in other foreign chroniclers and illustrators of that era, such as Léonce Angrand, George Squier and Charles Wiener (Soux).

⁴ For instance, in *Concierto Barroco* (1974), Carpentier creates a novel inspired on the opera *Montezuma* by Antonio Vivaldi, thus mimicking the composition of a European musical concert, yet using Latin American elements. In the story, we can see that music not only is present in the theme, but also in how Carpentier uses language both rhythmically and melodically. "*Concierto Barroco* reactualiza, a nivel del discurso de las ideas, las grandes preocupaciones de Carpentier en relación a la música y la identidad latinoamericana. Estas se pueden sintetizar en la defensa de una expresión nacional y en la necesidad de diferenciar entre una errónea concepción del folclorismo y el desarrollo auténtico de una tradición cultural" (Montes 9).

⁵ For example, in *De dónde son los cantantes* (1967), Sarduy portrays a peculiar city: "moderna-pasteurizada-ruinosa-kitsch [...] colorida, sintética, pop y plástica [que] recuerda mucho a la transcripción de un modelo arquitectónico norteamericano" (Burgos 10). With this description, the writer makes a mockery of Latin-American modernity, as he also clarifies that this depiction is fictional, "un artificio, un 'escenario teatral' que deliberadamente desea hacer notar que es teatral, una simulación" (Burgos 10). Hence, he uses songs to reinforce the idea of implausibility: "inserta una canción que nada tiene que ver con la idiosincrasia del lugar [demostrando] que el espacio es completamente ficticio, imaginario: que aunque usa como motivo un referente concreto, sin embargo, no deja de ser un espacio de ficción" (Burgos 12).

⁶ A clear example of this phenomenon is visible in Luis Rafael Sánchez's semi-fictional novel *La importancia de llamarse Daniel Santos* (1988), where the writer reconstructs Santos' musical biography. He uses the languages of *bolero* and *guaracha* seeking to represent the intertextual influence of songs and musical genres in literature, creating a novel where "[l]os diversos modos y

On the other hand, in the *crónica* genre, popular music began to be explored mostly with a special focus on singers' biographies. Because popular singers are highly praised in several locations, *cronistas* became mediators between artists and readers, allowing audiences to enter their idols' biographical territory, certainly inaccessible by the mere experience of listening to their songs (Plata 128). For instance, this is noticeable in the work of Mexican writer Carlos Monsiváis who, between the 1970s and 1980s, wrote *crónicas* about public local stars, such as actors, vedettes, and singers. This writer's approach was based on the interpellation he made to the traditionalist/authoritarian decision of choosing the heroes that represent a community, originally coming mostly from the political or military spectrum. Monsiváis subverted this decision by portraying alternative heroes in literature, recognised by the populace.

For example, in "Instituciones: Juan Gabriel", the *cronista* presents a well-informed biography of this popular Mexican artist, referring to his origins, his influences, his unique style, his private life, his plural audience, as well as his songs. Monsiváis connects all these pieces in a unique way, creating a fluid text that allows remembering not only who Juan Gabriel was, but also the relevance of his music. This is possible by the singular way Monsiváis achieves to articulate all these elements in unison:

Y sí, hay razones del gusto que se esparcen, las chavas persuaden a sus novios, a las madres se les desarrollan hábitos que muy pronto dejan de ser clandestinos, y el inflexible paterfamilias se descubre una mañana tarareando: *En esta primavera/ será tu regalo un ramo de rosas / Te llevaré a la playa, te besaré en el mar/ y muchas otras cosas*. La prensa informa del fenómeno de letras reiterativas y pegajosas y melodías prensiles, y reconoce un filón: el compositor más famoso de México es un joven amanerado a quien se le atribuyen indecibles escándalos, y a cuya fama coadyuvan poderosamente chistes y mofas. (283)

In the forecited fragment, the elements that characterise the peculiar image of Juan Gabriel are all mentioned, keeping the biographical component at the centre of the narration. However, it is also relevant to pay attention to the way Monsiváis cites Juan Gabriel's love song "En esta primavera" along the *crónica*, employing a literary strategy that is also present in other texts of his authorship dedicated to singers. As we can see, the song is not separated from the narration, but part of it. It is not inadvertently, but purposefully cited and used to explain that Juan Gabriel's songs –regardless of their content– can be sung by anyone. In this *crónica*, Monsiváis demonstrates that the singer's music –perhaps unintentionally– has contributed to questioning gender categories. The *crónica* makes a subversive action visible, originated in the language of popular music, trespassing cultural boundaries. This

hablas de la lengua castellana enfocados en bares y barrios de países bajos como Puerto Rico, Cuba, Colombia, Venezuela, Perú y México, van configurando una suerte de apreciación de un significado existencial en la memoria colectiva, que el autor utiliza como procedimiento del relato" (Mora 63).

fusion between low and high culture was indeed an essential action in Monsiváis' cultural theory (Egan 141).

Another function of songs in Monsiváis' *crónicas* is the use of titles as an activation of memory to introduce a topic.⁷ For example, in "Amanecí otra vez en tus brazos" the writer echoes a song by Mexican singer José Alfredo Jiménez, which speaks about a man who wakes up in the arms of his lover and feels happy because they will spend together *muchas, muchas horas*. Monsiváis articulates the title of this song in a strategic and non-explicit way. Although the section clearly alludes to Jiménez's song, its content is related to the 1968 Mexican social revolt, where students took possession of Mexico City's main square (*El Zócalo*). In this regard, Linda Egan states that,

[h]ay discordancia entre la letra de la canción y la discusión solemne de ciudadanos enfrentados a fuerzas gubernamentales en el sitio más simbólico de la conciencia cívica. Y así, básicamente, la voluntad incontenible de Monsiváis de fusionar la cultura popular con la oficial nos insta a percibir el subtítulo no como si fuera discordante sino irónico. Los mexicanos nunca despiertan en los brazos cariñosos de su gobierno; en el Zócalo político están encerrados en una discordia social que José Alfredo señala como de 'muchas, muchas horas'. (155-156)

It would be logical to think that Monsiváis' work inspired Chilean writer Pedro Lemebel to write about songs and singers because –although he did not make this explicit– he indeed acknowledged that the Mexican author was one of his main literary influences.⁸ However, whereas both writers share several similarities, it is possible to identify that the use of language is a notable difference. Because Monsiváis was an academic with a background in economics, philosophy, literature and theological studies, his language is highly elaborated and even poetical: he did not see a distinction between a poem and a song, his head was full of poetry, biblical and popular song verses equally balanced (Egan 153). On the other hand, Lemebel used a colloquial type of language, "contaminated" by words and expressions used by people inhabiting Chile's marginal zones.

Same as Monsiváis, Lemebel subverts the image of idols that are thought to represent Chilean identity. Instead of speaking about the typical heroes that are present in history books, Lemebel creates his own version of national icons who are part of Chile's popular collective imaginary, depicting biographies of several famous singers in the national context. Despite the relevance of the musical element in Lemebel's literature, this is an aspect not yet fully explored in academia. The next

⁷ This is what Gérard Genette and Marie Maclean call "paratext," defined as a "communicating instance [between] addresser and addressee" offering "to anyone and everyone the possibility either to enter or of turning back" (263, 261). A "paratext" is formed by a "peritext" and an "epitext." The former refers to "the titles of chapters or certain notes", while the latter is related to "the messages situated, at least originally, outside the book" (263, 264).

⁸ See "Trazo mi ciudad - Pedro Lemebel - Santiago - Chile." *YouTube*, uploaded by elotrocine, 23 Sep. 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n21S1UQoMIA&t=231s> (min. 03:00).

section analyses how existing scholarly works have approached this topic in Lemebel's literature.

Musical references in Lemebel's Literature

In one of the first academic studies ever written about Lemebel's work, Salvador Benadava purports that the writer's references to popular music are inspired by his childhood memories: the music he used to listen to as a child. This is something that the *cronista* corroborated in several interviews as well, such as the one published by Rodrigo Alarcón in 2015, where Lemebel said the following:

La radio fue muy importante para mí. En mi casa no había libros, era una exotiquez en mi casa, pero sí había una radio prendida, voz y música. Creo que, antes que la literatura, fue la música la que tuvo que ver con algún lirismo infantil que después desarrollé en mis crónicas de grande (qtd in Alarcón).

Benadava also states that references to popular music in Lemebel's work are complex and indeed difficult to categorise. The scholar particularly refers to the writer's strategic use of songs, acknowledging that they might pursue different goals. Yet, he also identifies something that is indeed relevant; that is, the use of popular songs as a way to connect with his audience. According to Benadava:

Hay veces en que, claramente, se trata de recrear una atmósfera [...] o de otorgar a una crónica un segundo nombre explicitante; o de bautizar un libro; o de ilustrar un pensamiento; o de provocar un efecto humorístico. Otras veces la intención es más opaca, obligando al lector a descubrir el sentido de la cita: ¿busca el autor crear una complicidad con quienes conocen esas melodías?, ¿desea impulsar al lector a descubrir relaciones entre textos que, a primera vista, no parecen tener mayor vinculación? (61)

This statement is something that Daniel Party and Luis Achondo agree with in their study about songs and singers in Lemebel's literature. Yet, their emphasis is on how songs are particularly aligned to the narrative voice of his most recognised character: *La loca*, as part of her own musical repertoire. They mention that this not only is distinguished in his *crónicas*, but also in his only novel *Tengo miedo torero* (2001) where *boleros* are used to melodramatically exacerbate the emotions of *La loca del frente* (Party and Achondo 289).

Also, both scholars propose that songs act in Lemebel's *crónicas* mostly as background music, which they do not consider as relevant as the writer's depiction of singers' biographies, an aspect that Lemebel fully explored in his work, especially in his earliest productions. For instance:

En sus antologías de crónicas, desde *De perlas y cicatrices* (1998) hasta *Serenata cafiola* (2008), un número considerable de textos están escritos en

torno a una estrella de la canción chilena o internacional, como Palmenia Pizarro, Zalo Reyes, Myriam Hernández, Cecilia, Raphael, Lucho Gatica, Fernando Ubierno, Manu Chao y Silvio Rodríguez. Con relación a estas crónicas sobre músicos, nuevamente concordamos con Benadava, quien estima que en los escritos de Lemebel sobre cantantes 'la dimensión musical es muchísimo menos importante que los aspectos psicológicos, políticos sociológicos o semiológicos'. (289)

We concur with Party and Achondo in that the biographical element –beyond the musical– is an aspect that Lemebel indeed emphasises in his work. Lemebel's biographical depiction of singers is constructed around their position on political, social or gender-focused topics. Following that order, they can be visualised –for example– in the *crónicas* dedicated to singers Joan Manuel Serrat, Palmenia Pizarro, and Raphael, respectively. Party and Achondo also clarify that these three topics are hierarchically positioned in the writer's work, where matters related to politics or gender are not as relevant as the social commitment these singers demonstrated along their careers (291).

As per the strategy employed by Lemebel to connect with readers, both these scholars concur with Benadava in that the writer's interest in connecting the musical with the literary is to stimulate what they call a *proceso de seducción*. Also drawing on Monsiváis, they state that Lemebel's goal is to appeal to the readers' complicity, to get their attention, to activate their emotionality, before exposing his characteristic political and destabilising discourse (294). Yet, these works fail at providing specific examples on how the writer would achieve that connection with his audience, or which specific songs would contribute to performing that role, or how. This is certainly an undiscussed aspect that requires attention in order to better understand Lemebel's strategic articulation of songs in his *crónicas*.

On the other hand, Betina Campuzano specifically focuses on Lemebel's musical articulation in his late *crónica* compilation: *Serenata cafiola*. Campuzano highlights how biographies, song lyrics and melodies in Lemebel's forecited book somehow allow Chilean readers to reconnect with their memories, particularly those of the dictatorship. Articulated from the writer's autobiographical position, musical memories would appeal to emotions and atmospheres that were part of Chile's darkest times, thus eliciting a better understanding of the impact of past politics in the present (150):

La música opera de diferentes modos para despertar la rememoración: actúa como tapabocas, anima recuerdos, acompaña acciones violentas, se convierte en metonimia o en metáfora de la historia reciente. En el ámbito de lo político, la problematización no se configura tanto en las adhesiones o las denuncias consistentes de los artistas y sus letras al régimen, sino más bien en el modo en que esos ritmos y esas voces actúan como telón de fondo o música en off, pudiendo ser funcionales o no al sector hegemónico. Tampoco hallamos militancia partidaria en quien escucha, sino pura emoción frente al hecho musical que se asocia a una época o a una

situación familiar despertando así pura evocación. Y desde esa evocación, el cronista en el presente sí reconstruye, en un trabajo artesanal con la memoria, el pasado reciente desde una evidente definición política. (152)

A relevant idea proposed by Campuzano is that of understanding musical references as evoking a past memory. She briefly explains this by stating that references to yesteryear's popular singers and songs would help readers to connect with the moment in which they listened to these melodies; yet most importantly, to the historical context in which they evolved. She recognises that this is one of Lemebel's tactics to strategically introduce a political discourse; however, –same as in the works aforementioned– she fails at providing detailed examples on how this is achieved. Campuzano's article makes a general statement about the relevance of popular singers and songs in Lemebel's work, although without specifying which types of memories are in fact activated.

Some similarities are visible between Campuzano's views and those of Ángeles Mateo del Pino. Like the former, Mateo del Pino uses the concept *telón de fondo* to explain the functions of popular songs in the writer's *crónicas*, stating that:

si algo caracteriza la obra de este autor es precisamente el evidenciar que la realidad nunca está de más, por ello insta constantemente a refrescar la memoria, a recordar, a no olvidar, para lo que se vale no solo de la escritura, sea esta cuento, crónica literaria o novela, sino también de las artes visuales, se llamen ilustración, foto, performance, instalación o vídeo, y de la música. Una música que ha hecho suya, pero que igualmente pertenece a aquellas generaciones que se reconocen en ese telón de fondo melódico que nos regala constantemente Lemebel, provocando, como el amor, que la memoria sonora devenga experiencia compartida. (266)

For Mateo del Pino, a *telón de fondo* is also inspired in the writer's personal memories and present not only in his novel and *crónicas*, but also in one of his earliest fictional stories: "Ella entró por la ventana del baño" (*Incontables*, 1986), inspired in The Beatles' song "She came in through the bathroom window" (1969). Very briefly, Mateo del Pino interprets the connection between the song and the story plot, which depicts a love story between two teenagers who inhabit a poor neighbourhood in Santiago during the dictatorship.⁹ The title is visibly unrelated to the story, but connected to radio sounds that are played in the surroundings of the protagonist's house and somehow "come in through the bathroom window." Apparently, those sounds would come from Radio Cooperativa, one of the few

⁹ In Mateo del Pino's study, most musical references are related to Lemebel's radio program *Cancionero*, where melodies – outside the literary context – also act as a *telón de fondo*. For example, she recalls that his program started with the song "Invítame a pecar," interpreted by popular female singer Francisca Viveros Barradas, popularly known as Paquita la del Barrio. Mateo del Pino argues that Lemebel purposefully chose both singer and song because of their implicit meaning. In the popular Latin American collective imaginary, this artist represents female bravery because her songs melodramatically speak about justice and vengeance of masculine oppression, indeed a predominant theme in his radio show.

national stations that defied political control and which managed to find tactical ways to keep citizens informed about popular demonstrations during the military government. Mateo del Pino suggests that Lemebel used this reference in order to make explicit the belligerent context under which Chileans lived (280). This article is particularly interested in this type of reflections, where a musical reference complements the literary text, not only in terms of evoking a musical memory, but also to construct meaning, thus becoming an essential interpretive element. Following Eldrith Priest, we state that they would function as a “lure,” inviting the reader to reflect upon the sensations that music triggers on them: “how a world *may* be felt rather than how it is or how it must be experienced” (56).

Thus, in the light of these studies, we can assert that musical references – melodies, biographies and songs– respond to the writer’s strategy to convey a message that at most times interpellates the reader’s social commitment. Given that musical references are part of people’s collective imaginary, Lemebel would use them as a *proceso de seducción* in order to connect with his audience and elicit a response. Particularly, the songs used as a *telón de fondo* would contribute to achieving that goal, being supported by the unique abstraction that music facilitates, understanding that “music is able to articulate and set forth relations that language cannot –namely, relations that are revelatory rather than explanatory” (Priest 53).

Having clarified these concepts we can move on to analyse the meaningful use of songs in Lemebel’s *crónicas*, an aspect that –as above stated– previous studies have briefly mentioned. It is argued that Lemebel might have used each song in his literature with a deliberate purpose, a tactic that could only be interpreted if understanding the significance of a song or melody in a specific context and for a defined community.¹⁰ In the following sections we will interpret the intertextual/paratextual implication of some songs that are included in Lemebel’s late productions: *Serenata cafiola* and *Háblame de amores*. Theoretically, this analysis will be supported by views on popular songs and cultural identity, as well as the articulation of popular songs in literature from an affective perspective.

Lemebel’s *Crónicas*: Songs and Cultural Identity

The concept *telón de fondo* that we have previously introduced helps us to understand music as an essential complement to literature, contributing to making the text a more appealing piece of work, thus shortening the distance between writer and reader.¹¹ This phenomenon not only is present in literature, but also in

¹⁰ Oscar Contardo recalls that Lemebel proudly stated that his audience –at least in his radio program– was formed by taxi drivers, fruit market vendors, mechanics, construction workers and delinquents. To this list we must also add stay at home mothers. While there is evidence about the people he recognised as his radio audience, there is no clear information about whom he identified as his literary public. This is indeed an aspect difficult to track down, given the diverse formats of his work: published manuscripts, newspaper sections, pirated books and online blogs. Therefore, when we refer to his literary audience in this article, we will be speaking about his contemporary compatriots, those with whom he shared song memories.

¹¹ According to Mariano Muñoz-Hidalgo, this duality has lately gained recognition in academia, especially when analysing the relevance of popular songs. They fully represent the language of

other artistic languages, such as films. Although this article is not focused on film analysis, discussing how music is purposefully articulated in movies may help us to better comprehend the functions of background music in literature.

Simon Frith refers to this topic when analysing background music in movies, used to communicate messages not explicitly exposed by images. To explain this, he exposes the situation of a silent film scene where a woman walks down some stairs. Without sound the scene itself hardly tells a story. However, with suspense music, the scene acquires meaning because it anticipates that something is going to happen: “What we hear can, then, be a more powerful source of meaning than what we see. In this exercise, it seems, the music is more meaningful than the photography” (Frith 110-111).

The forecited case occurs because specific types of music may activate specific codes. Frith divides these in two: emotional and cultural. Emotional codes have two functions. “First, there is music designed to tell the *audience* how to feel [...] In general terms, this use of music is *culturally determined*: it draws on what is assumed to be the audience’s shared understanding of particular musical devices” (118). “The second function of emotional codes in film music is to tell us what the *characters in the film* are feeling. Here we find the most obvious use of operatic devices, leitmotifs, and so on, and here the codes are, in a sense, *composer determined*” (119). On the other hand, cultural codes “tell us where we are, [revealing] the basic social and cultural facts of the images we’re seeing: place and time (geography and history), social setting (sociology and political economy)” (120).

According to Frith, “the words without the music [are] usually unmemorable [because] song words are only remembered in their melodic and rhythmic setting” (160). This statement is quite useful to understand how song lyrics work in a literary piece and certainly, this can also be visualised in Lemebel’s *crónicas*. As we have anticipated, song titles and verses are often placed either as titles or as book sections in the writer’s work, strategically positioned to activate either a memory, an emotion, or both. Arguably, the author would use the title implicitly, expecting the reader to remember it by means of activating a musical memory, eliciting a specific atmosphere, thus facilitating to understand the message behind the text. Following Derrida, the writer would produce a piece of work mutually created, a text that is written multiple times and with different meanings depending on the reader’s cultural/musical background (355). This idea may also be supported by Tia DeNora’s views on music as an affective practice, as she states that the “social identity of the work –like all social identities– emerges from its interaction and juxtaposition to others, people and things” (31).

An example of this can be found in the *crónica* “¿Dónde estabas tú?” a title that connects to a homonym song by the popular Chilean band Los Jaivas.¹² This intertextual connection is possible for readers with the same background as the

quotidian life in popular sectors, facilitating the comprehension of how such practices originate, circulate and consolidate, an aspect indeed overlooked by canonical historiography (104).

¹² Los Jaivas are a Chilean music band formed in 1963. They compose psychedelic rock songs, played with electronic and Andean folk instruments.

writer, given that this song is part of Chile's collective imaginary. Readers with a different background might also create their own intertextual connections, yet possibly distinct to those purposefully intended by the author.¹³ For most Chilean readers, the title "¿Dónde estabas tú?" will most likely activate a musical memory, as if pressing a "play" button in their minds. When this action is enacted, the song will accompany the text as background music, eliciting connections that would otherwise unlikely occur. This is possible because, as stated by Jeanette Bicknell, "when we listen to music and let it dominate our minds, inner speech ceases and is replaced by music" (114).

Besides that, it is particularly intriguing the way that both song lyrics and literary text are connected. If we analyse the song words, we will certainly find a coherent mutual discourse, which would arguably demonstrate that the author not only did use the song with a paratextual purpose, but also that he probably expected the reader to listen to it in order to accurately interpret the text. This would function as a strategy where the meaning of a popular song contributes to complement/construct the meaning of a literary work, an action that was indeed common in the writer's literature:

[Lemebel] nunca ofrece al lector el 'alimento digerido', invitándolo a pensar, a interpretar las imágenes, a descodificar los signos, a investir los implícitos. La visión extremadamente respetuosa de Lemebel al lector queda en parte demostrada por la siguiente declaración [...]: 'Hablo de sus cosas (de las cosas del pueblo) con un poco de aparatosa literatura, pero porque creo que la supuesta identidad chilena es más compleja que la imagen simplona y atontada que nos da el rating televisivo'. (Benadava 49)

Los Jaivas' song "¿Dónde estabas tú?" was originally written in the 1970s as part of the soundtrack of the movie *Palomita blanca*, directed by Raúl Ruiz (1941-2011). The movie was inspired by Enrique Lafourcade's homonym novel (1971) and filmed in 1973. However, because of its social implications it was banned by the military dictatorship, being just released in 1992. Originally, *Palomita blanca* narrates the love story of María and Juan Carlos, two teenagers who fall in love, despite their different social realities.¹⁴ María is poor and Juan Carlos is rich. In the song, María questions Juan Carlos where he was when she was doing the domestic chores,

¹³ For example, singers Benny Moré from Cuba, Vega from Spain and Danna Paola from Mexico are also interpreters of homonym songs. Readers from such locations or familiar with these singers might probably make different intertextual connections if reading Lemebel's forecited *crónica*. Yet, they would most likely be unable to find a logical link between the story and the song lyrics.

¹⁴ According to Valeria de los Ríos, Ruiz's political movies would unveil his own personal reflections and political convictions. She cites fragments from past interviews in which Ruiz would corroborate this idea. For example, "mis films tienen la característica de ser reflexiones sobre un problema político y sobre la manera en que se está rodando tal problema político. Por eso es por lo que a veces se comienza desarrollando algunas imágenes con un talante más bien épico y se acaba por poner en cuestión ese talante" (121), or "[e]l proceso político nos empuja hacia la producción de un tiempo de cine que pueda ser útil inmediatamente, un cine útil. Nos sentimos impulsados hacia eso por las circunstancias. Indudablemente cuando te entregas a este compromiso, descubres, poco a poco, elementos y rastros de la cultura de la resistencia" (121).

such as cleaning the bathroom, making the beds or selling bottles for a living, certainly unfamiliar actions for someone coming from a privileged background:

¿Dónde estabas tú?
cuando había que...
mudar la ropa, limpiar el baño,
pagar la luz, sacar la basura,
hacer las camas, ordenar las cosas
conversar un poco, salir a comprar,
limpiar el futuro, prender el horno,
salir al mercado, vender las botellas,
remojar porotos, lustrar la razón... (Los Jaivas)¹⁵

The song functions as a social interpellation to the privileged class, unaware of the necessities of the poor. Towards the end of the song, Los Jaivas continue to use actions that describe quotidian activities such as mending, sweeping, or organising home artefacts, yet this time with metaphorical meanings: “surcir la cultura / barrer la mentira / ordenar los sueños” (Los Jaivas). Thus, their song not only does interpellate the high class for their socially advantaged position, but also for their lack of commitment to speak up and make changes from their privileged place. Los Jaivas do not make this explicit. On the contrary, they use a metaphorical type of language, inviting listeners to interpret the lyrics.

This idea is echoed in Lemebel's homonym *crónica*. The text addresses a high-class young man –unmentioned in the first part of the text– interpellating his knowledge of Chile in the 1980s. The writer assumes this youngster to believe that those times were ideal because he did not have to face economic hardships. The author thinks that this man's 1980's memories are idyllic and romantic, just how the military government intended to showcase them, yet different to that of thousands of rebels who spent those years defying oppression and claiming for justice:

Y si te han contado que todo era maravilloso en los ochenta, pendejo, que todos íbamos al Omium a tomar un cóctel con la chasquilla enlacada y usábamos esa ropa estúpida que salía en los comerciales. Si te han dicho que esa década fue la más taquillera en estéticas del ropaje, que las nenas eran iguales a la Bolocco con las hombreras de Farrah Fawcett [...] Que todos éramos imbéciles, rubitos y danzábamos al compás de las botas. No te la creas pendejo, por suerte había otro Chile ochentista y allendista, donde ser artesano era buena onda, donde usar lana peruana era ser disidente y decente, donde oler a pachulí y colorearnos de lila era una contraseña (*Háblame* 199).

¹⁵ See video clip “Los Jaivas: Dónde estas tú / Versión actualizada 2019 /Los Jaivas.” *YouTube*, uploaded by Los Jaivas Oficial, 3 Aug. 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BwN2VgN6JKw>

Lemebel is familiar with this Chile –*ochentista* and *allendista*– and is aware that mainstream media has obliterated it. He evidences this in some recent movies, which have opted for depicting the 1980s in a nostalgic way, highlighting the country's achievements, rather than the chaos, tortures and disappearances. Towards the second part of the *crónica*, Lemebel discloses that the young man he addresses is the prominent film director Pablo Larraín.¹⁶ Although his name is not mentioned, we can tell this by the references given. Lemebel interpellates Larraín for filming movies intended to be political, yet which approach memory in a melancholic and unoffending way. The writer suggests that this young man is unable to understand the hardships of the past because of his privileged background. Similar to what is expressed in Los Jaivas' song, Lemebel proudly states that he is unauthorised to speak about the poor because of growing up as a rich kid. Hence, he asks him:

“¿Dónde estabas tú”, cantaban Los Jaivas, y hoy te pregunto lo mismo. ¿Dónde estabas tú? Ni aunque hagas mil películas de la dictadura se nos olvidará esa canción. Dime, ¿dónde estabas tú? Hay algo que no viviste y es tarde para las explicaciones cinematográficas. La memoria es un caracol que se cierra en su concha inexcusable. Ocurrió tal cual, nosotros aquí y ustedes allá, como si no existiera la tiranía. (201)

The social division Lemebel addresses by echoing Los Jaivas' song is a notorious characteristic of Chilean identity. While this polarisation was increased in the dictatorship, it is relevant to notice that its origins are actually traced back to colonial times (Larraín 10). Jorge Larraín affirms that the main legacy from colonialism to Chile was the notion of respect and submission to authority, embodied in the figure of both politicians and the Catholic Church. Both instigated a dominant mindset in the country, mainly characterised for their reluctance to modernity and intolerance to subaltern groups, such as the indigenous and the working-class (Larraín 10).

Meanwhile, during the dictatorship, Chilean identity was supposed to represent patriotic values, as well as devotion and respect for the military authority. Those who felt unrepresented by this despotic mindset were placed outside the community throughout diverse tactics, mostly violent ones. But also, there were other less forceful, disguised as actions that would benefit people and would contribute to imposing order in the country. One of them was the expatriation of national citizens. The other one was the redistribution of low-income people – merged in high-income zones– into areas that were homogeneously poor, so that the poor and the rich were not mixed and their social differences were properly distinguished (de Mattos 49–50). To date, this social segregation is still visible in the country and highly notorious in people's unequal access to quality education, health and housing.

¹⁶ Pablo Larraín Matte (1976-) is a Chilean film director, producer and scriptwriter. He has directed several films, gaining international recognition, being nominated to several international awards. His parents are Hernán Larraín and Magdalena Matte, two Chilean politicians linked to Unión Demócrata Independiente, one of the supporting parties of Pinochet's regime.

This historical summary somehow explains why Chilean identity remains politically polarised between those who have economic/political power and those who do not. The first group has a particular vision of Chilean recent history, opposed to that of the second. Because of these irreconcilable differences, Chileans cannot see themselves as a single community, being united by a shared geographic space, yet divided by their ethical position on recent history (Garretón 223). Therefore, Chilean identity cannot be described as one alone, but possibly two: hegemonic and counter-hegemonic, formed by people's ideological position as well as their own experiences –of wealth and scarcity, of justice and injustice, of privileges and displacement– in this country's unequal society.

Because of his social background and political views, it is not surprising that Lemebel identifies with the counter-hegemonic type of Chilean identity. Not only does he write about underprivileged people, but also he addresses his work to them, expecting them to decode the signs that are strategically embedded in his composition. Previously, we stated that the songs alluded in his literature would most likely activate a musical memory in most Chilean readers. We must clarify now that such musical memories would be particularly meaningful to people in low and middle-income sectors contemporary of Lemebel because of their cultural competence.¹⁷ This idea is supported by Patrick Hogan who states that “our empathic responses are shaped by racial, ethnic, religious, national, gender, and other affiliations [...] This suggests that, depending on the author and target audience of a work, there may be systematic distortions in keeping the experience of group affiliations or ideologies about such affiliations” (“Fictions” 118).

This can be evidenced in the *crónica* “Son quince, son veinte, son treinta,” which paratextually alludes to the *cumbia* song “Un año más,” popularised by the famous national band La Sonora de Tommy Rey.¹⁸ In Chile, the New Year celebration is usually accompanied by this memorable song, which farewells the year gone and welcomes the coming one. This is particularly common in peripheral areas, where this celebration is notoriously festive and held until late hours, accompanied by danceable music and great amounts of food and drinks.

In “Son quince, son veinte, son treinta” Lemebel narrates a traumatic episode he lived after a New Year celebration in his youth, recalling that “después de las doce, luego de los abrazos y del reiterado rito familiar del pollo con ensalada de apio [...] me tiritaba a la calle frenética, recorriendo kilómetros de acera, esquivando los autos que culebreaban las primeras luces del año entrante en el acalorado amanecer” (Lemebel, *Serenata* 41–42). Late at night in the street, expecting a casual sexual encounter, he started being followed by a car. Unexpectedly, the car accelerated and one man violently pulled him in. Several

¹⁷ Bourdieu states that “[a] work of art has meaning and interest only for someone who possesses the cultural competence, that is, the code, into which it is encoded” (2). For this, he distinguishes three types of tastes according to people's educational levels and social classes: a) legitimate, b) middle-brow, and c) popular. While the first one represents the taste of the dominant class, the second and third ones characterise the tastes of the middle and the working class.

¹⁸ La Sonora de Tommy Rey is a *cumbia* band formed in 1982, led by his lead vocalist Patricio Zúñiga (1944-), also known as “Tommy Rey.” Songs by this band are usually played in Chilean popular celebrations, such as birthday parties and national holidays.

drunken men were inside, celebrating the New Year, with the song “Un año más” playing in the background:

En el asiento delantero del vehículo iban otros riendo y cantando: ‘Son quince, son veinte, son treinta’. Te vamos a dar duro. ¿No andas buscando eso? Tómame un trago, maricón, me obligaban a beber, chorreándome la cara de pisco que corría por mi cuello ardiendo. ‘Son quince son veinte, son treinta’, súbele el volumen, pónela (sic) más fuerte, por si este maraco se pone a gritar cuando le reventemos la botella en el culito. (42)

This tragic and threatening moment –describing a gang rape attempt– finally ends when the drunken men start a fight among themselves. The victim was a nuisance in this conflict so they decide to push him out of the car: “Ya, te fuiste, desaparece, me dijeron, empujándome abajo. Y sin esperar que me lo repitieran, salté a la calle y eché a correr” (*Serenata* 45). Walking back home in the middle of nowhere the narrator felt vulnerable, yet also relieved that he had escaped the terrible scene. Meanwhile, at dawn, he thought he could still hear “son quince, son veinte, son treinta” played somewhere in the far distance.

In Chile, “son quince, son veinte, son treinta” is an unmistakably recognised verse from the forecited song “Un año más,” composed by Hernán Gallardo (1928-2013).¹⁹ While several *cumbia* bands have recorded it, La Sonora de Tommy Rey’s version is the most popular. The lyrics read as follows:

Un año más, que se va
Un año más, ¡Cuántos se han ido!
Un año más, ¿Qué más da?
¡Cuántos se han ido ya!

[...]

Si has gozado, también has sufrido
Si has llorado, también has reído
Un año más, ¿Qué más da?
¡Cuántos se han ido ya!

Son quince, son veinte, son treinta
Cuarenta, cincuenta, sesenta

¹⁹ Although this cumbia is festive and connects to Chilean popular celebrations, its lyrics are more reflexive rather than joyful. The speaker is expecting the stroke of midnight on New Year’s Eve while recalling the current year. He remembers having celebrated and suffered; cried and laughed, and concludes – hopelessly – that a new year will not change anything. It is just one more year, like so many that are already gone. According to Clavero et al., Gallardo was inspired to write this song during a melancholic and solitary New Year celebration in 1977, after the recent passing of his mother (qtd by Karmy et al. 406).

No importa los años que tienes
Es el tiempo el que no se detiene... (Sonora de Tommy Rey)²⁰

Like the “Happy Birthday to You” song, “Un año más” is one of those melodies that are played in specific times of the year, becoming anachronistic in others. It would be awkward to play or listen to this song during the year because it is purposefully intended for the New Year celebration. This is something not officially stated, yet a tacit code for most Chileans. “Un año más” falls within the category of “functional songs” where “the singer expresses himself directly as a member of a specific community, engaged in performing a task, or taking part in a ritual, or assisting at a social event” (Cone 49).

Because of its symbolic meaning, Lemebel arguably used a verse of this song paratextually, in order to set a *telón de fondo*. However, because of the contradiction between the festive song and the traumatising scene depicted, it is possible to perceive that the musical allusion actually works as a *contrapunto*. This is a concept that has elsewhere been defined by Ángeles Mateo del Pino, aiming to explain the purposeful inconsistency between text and song. For example, if the narration spoke about a sad event, music might probably be joyful. Probably echoing Monsiváis, Lemebel used this tactic intentionally, being aware of the influence of popular songs and melodies in his community of readers and listeners, trusting their cultural competence to decode the signs that he deliberately camouflaged in his work.

For example, in the forecited *crónica*, the song “Un año más” echoes a happy and familiar memory. Arguably, the author includes it in the title and also repeats it along the narration –as a literary device– aiming to reminisce the New Year celebration times in his readership, prompting a feeling of unity that accompanies the reading. This action may be possible because, as stated by Göran Folkestad, music can help to strengthen the bonds within a group, making them “feel that they belong to one another” (156). However, as we have previously seen, the content of the *crónica* is distressing rather than joyful. The story deploys the hardships of poverty –especially for homosexuals– namely the ignorance, discrimination, homophobia and violence from people living under similar conditions as his. Unlike the *crónica* “¿Dónde estabas tú?” –which interpellates the privileged class– this text works as a social denunciation from the margin and for the margin, confronting the audience about their intolerance towards the members of their own community. Thus, song and text are juxtaposed, defying one another, yet tied by the same context and background: a twofold message that the writer articulates; however, whose decoding is ultimately in the hands of the reader.

²⁰ See video clip on “La Sonora De Tommy Rey - Un Año Más (En Vivo).” *YouTube*, uploaded by La Sonora de Tommy Rey, 30 Dec. 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RgxJCyLk5TY>

Lemebel's *crónicas*: Songs and Affect

There is a strong affective component in Lemebel's *crónicas* as well, visible in the writer's description of personal, collective, and familiar experiences. This is evident in some *crónicas* articulated with songs or song verses, alluding to musical memories, and linked to affective experiences. Arguably, this is a strategy the author would use in order to elicit an emotional response in his readership, thus complementing/enhancing the written discourse. This section analyses two of Lemebel's *crónicas* where emotions are an essential narrative element. The *crónicas* are "Qué pena que no me duela tu nombre hora" and "La ciudad sin ti," two texts that indirectly echo the homonym songs by singers Alfredo Zitarrosa²¹ and Luis Aguilé,²² respectively.

Literature is indeed a common vehicle to transfer emotions. For Patrick Hogan, literature is "to a great extent, founded on the simulation of ideas, attitudes, and interest of characters [presenting] us with necessarily nonegoistic imaginations of emotion-rich situations" (*What Literature* 68). Also, literary works stimulate us to imagine other people's experiences, involving our emotion systems in a unique form, directing "our attention to nuances of emotional expression that we might ordinarily overlook" (68).

In Hogan's view, emotional experiences are deliberately articulated and transferred to the reader. He also argues that writers "compose their stories for other people" (30). A relevant concept this scholar uses to explain this connection is called "simulation." He defines it as "a key operation of the human mind [...] the process that we engage in when imagining the way things might play out if we engage in various sorts of activity" (Hogan, "Affect Studies" 2). Under this premise, writers would anticipate readers' responses by evaluating possible interpretive scenarios. In a negative one, no emotions are triggered. In a desired one, some feeling of pleasure is activated, making the reader want to know and feel more about the story and its characters (4).

On the same line of thought, Nancy Armstrong states that writers constantly evaluate readers' emotional responses, developing a unique ability to imagine how their "own expression of emotion must look to someone not so personally invested. [Writers] imagine not only how it must feel to be on track, but also how an impartial spectator would view and evaluate [their] reactions to such suffering" (445-446).

From the receiver's perspective, Hogan argues that a reader may perceive such emotions in two different levels that he calls "empathy" and "emotion contagion." In both cases, the cause of emotion is someone else's. "In the case of empathy, that object is the feeling state of some other person. In the case of emotion contagion, the object is whatever we take to have caused that feeling state in the other person" (*What Literature* 63). Emotion contagion is indeed a more genuine,

²¹ Alfredo Zitarrosa (1936-1989) was a popular Uruguayan singer, writer and journalist. He was a Communist Party member and lived in exile during Uruguay's dictatorship.

²² Luis Aguilé (1936-2009) was an Argentine composer and interpreter of romantic songs, highly popular in Latin America and Spain during the 1950s.

personal and spontaneous experience because –in such case– the emotions of others are lived as one’s own.

It is relevant to clarify that feeling an emotion is not the same as living an emotion. If we feel an emotion we will probably be able to name it: “a feeling of anger, a feeling of elation, a feeling of nostalgia, or a feeling of jealousy” (Robinson 6). That is, if we read a text that makes us feel things that we are able to name, it means that we have activated the mind to give us the answer. Meanwhile, living an emotion is different. This process allows the body to speak to us without the mind interference and it is perceived in our physical responses. This experience is called “Affect.”

An affect theorist, Brian Massumi uses a relevant concept to explain how emotions are manifested in the body, called “intensity.” He proposes that intensity “is embodied in purely autonomic reactions most directly manifested in the skin—at the surface of the body, at its interface with things” (25). It is a nonconscious process, “outside expectation and adaptation, as disconnected from meaningful sequencing, from narration, as it is from vital function” (25). This is evident, for example, when external elements trigger physical reactions that we struggle to define, but we can clearly perceive. If we attempt to give them a name we would be qualifying them, thus involving the mind. Intensity, on the other hand, is incipient. It is the spark of an emotion, sometimes inhibited or incomplete because of the strangeness it provokes on us.

It would not be surprising to state that music –same as literature– can also evoke emotional responses. In this regard, Jenefer Robinson –drawing on Stephen Davies– argues that music “can communicate emotion directly to audiences by means of mirroring responses” (388). For example, “If I hear a sad expression in the music, I mimic the expression I hear and thus acquire the corresponding feeling” (388). Robinson’s view echoes Massumi’s in that “music directly affects us physiologically and acts directly on the motor system [...] without our recognizing what causes them” (392).

Meanwhile, –as previously mentioned– Eldrith Priest argues that music functions as a “lure” that invites us to reflect upon the sensations that it triggers on us. However, he clarifies that in that process, rather than asking ourselves how music makes us feel, the question we should ask is how we may possibly feel, “how a world *may* be felt rather than how it is or how it must be experienced” (56). In this sense, music may help us project our feelings in abstract contexts, anticipating our emotional responses in unfamiliar scenarios.

Simon Frith also refers to this phenomenon yet paying special attention to the composition of song lyrics. Same as in literary texts, Frith purports that a lyricist’s task is to create a story narrated by characters. The way that a lyricist articulates the elements of the composition will determine the listener’s engagement with the song, and thus, his/her emotional response (184). Frith’s view is analogous to Hogan’s in that both concentrate on the role of the author as an agent whose task is to simulate and stimulate emotions.

As we have tried to demonstrate along this article, pop songs are an essential component in some of Lemebel’s *crónicas*. In such pieces, we can identify

two voices. On one hand, we recognise the narrator's voice, which is –at most times– the author himself speaking in first person. He shares his experiences in a friendly manner, creating a close and intimate connection with the reader. On the other hand, we distinguish the narrator's voice in the songs that accompany the text. The characters in those songs also tell us a story. We argue that Lemebel would grasp them and use them as a “lure” in order to complement his own narration, inviting the reader to decipher their role in the text.

Yet, it is relevant to mention that, while lyrics are important for Lemebel, so is the music that accompanies them. In fact, words are meaningless if disconnected from the melody that they evoke. Therefore, Lemebel places them not only to be read, but also to be sung, aware that they might spark emotive memories in his audience given the familiarity they inspire. An example of this, can be seen in the *crónica* “Qué pena que no me duela tu nombre ahora,” echoing Zitarrosa's popular song “Qué pena.”

In this *crónica*, Lemebel speaks about an unrequited love story with a straight man, whose name is unrevealed. Cecilia, a common friend of both, introduces them and they immediately make a connection. After some time, the author gets to know him better and ends up falling in love with him. He is aware that a romantic relationship is impossible. However, as a gesture of his genuine love, he arranges an unforgettable present for his birthday: a passionate performance, interrupting the traffic in the street at night. In third person, calling himself a *loca*, Lemebel recalls that:

Justo a la medianoche, completamente desnudo y en medio de la avenida con su foto pegada en mi pecho, ahí estaba la loca enamorada en medio de un gran corazón dibujado con pegamento neoprén que encendí inflamando el asfalto cual molotov cardíaca. Allí estaba la loca chiflada de amor bajo su ventana en medio del estampido de las micros y autos bocineando detenidos por esa tarjeta de fuego humano en el happy birthday de la pasión homosexual [música]. (*Háblame* 226)²³

Not only was his friend astounded by this peculiar present, but also thankful. This gesture brought them even closer, strengthening their friendship. The author does not specify whether they finally consummated a romantic relationship. He just states “De ahí vino el amor con su violenta frescura. No podíamos despegarnos ni un solo momento” (227). Lemebel also mentions that because of their closeness, the man was forced to break up with his girlfriend, who was suspicious and jealous about

²³ In February 2015, one month after Lemebel's death, Chilean film director Tevo Díaz published a column on a Chilean newspaper entitled “Lemebelia”, where he reveals being the unnamed man in Lemebel's *crónica* “Qué pena que no me duela tu nombre ahora.” He recalls the birthday episode in the following way: “Al mirar a través, te vi Pedro, en plena avenida, esperando la luz roja para hacer un corazón gigante de neoprén que encendiste parando el tráfico, y tú, al centro, en foco perfecto, en pelotas, con una foto mía también en llamas que chamuscaba tu pecho. Ese fue mi regalo de cumpleaños, un pasaporte cultural al infinito de la imaginación. Gracias Peter” (Díaz).

their bond and even forced him to be tested for HIV: “¿Cachái [música], Pedro, lo que he pasado por ti? [música]” (227).

Towards the *crónica*'s denouement, Lemebel sadly reveals that their friendship was broken when his friend decided to move overseas. Although he kept on loving him for long, time and distance helped him heal his broken heart. His final words are highly expressive, and we can see the emotional component in them. Arguably, this would also function as a strategy to activate a feeling of empathy in his readers, possibly eliciting a comparison between his and their own love experiences:

El invierno se acaba [música], hoy descubrí el fogonazo de los aromos en mi ventana, una gota de rocío borra el corazón en el vidrio. Ya no te quiero como entonces, más bien ya no te quiero [música]. Desde Nueva York un mail me cuenta que regresas, justo ahora cuando me están brotando plumas migratorias para volar. (228)

In several parts of the *crónica* we can see the word “música” in square brackets. We interpret this as a code that the writer expects us to decipher; that is, to include music in that place, transforming the reading experience into an interactive/musical one. Because of the paratextual allusion, we assume that Lemebel invites us to recall Zitarrosa's forecited song. If we do so and proceed to analyse its lyrics, we will realise that this connection makes perfect sense. Both *crónica* and song share the same voice: a man who goes through a painful love experience, healed with time and distance. The song reads as follows:

Qué pena, que no me duela
Tu nombre ahora.
Qué pena, que no me duela
El dolor.
Qué pensarás
A quién le dirás
Que conmigo podías
Perdonarte y llorar.
Cuándo vendrás
A buscar lo demás,
El que ayer te quería
Hoy te puede olvidar (Zitarrosa)²⁴

²⁴ The expression “qué pena” deserves special attention. Although the speaker in both song and *crónica* manifest having overcome a romantic deception, the idea of saying “qué pena” (what a shame!), implies that they regret not feeling the same today. This presents as a contradiction in their discourse. They have forgotten the person they loved yet they wish they still love him/her, despite of their suffering. Listen to song on “Qué Pena - Alfredo Zitarrosa.” *YouTube*, uploaded by O Canal do Roos, 27 apr. 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Lu-GaYN3wQ>

While the *crónica* –as an independent text– functions activating an empathic response in the reader because of its content, we can also see that adding music to it would contribute to enhancing that response by making it more personal and meaningful. As previously anticipated, because this song is popular and most likely familiar for the writer's readership, it might help to connect with their own traumatic love experiences, as well as their overcoming, thus eliciting what Hogan calls "emotion contagion" (*What Literature* 63).

Another *crónica* with similar characteristics is "La ciudad sin ti." In this text, love is again at the centre of the narrative. Lemebel recalls his school years –during the Allende government– when he met a classmate who was affiliated to the Communist Youth of Chile. He admired him not only for his revolutionary spirit, but also because he was strangely unafraid of talking to him, despite his effeminacy, a punished behaviour in Chile's patriarchal society: "extraño era que, siendo yo un mariposuelo evidente, fueras el único que me daba bola en mi rincón del patio, arriesgándote a las burlas" (*Serenata* 37).

What also made this boy different was his musical taste. Teenagers his age –especially revolutionary ones– would listen to *Nueva Canción* singers and bands, such as Quilapayún or Víctor Jara, musicians whose lyrics were strongly committed with politics. Instead, this young man seemed to enjoy romantic popular music, an aspect that could also be interpreted as an echo of his dissidence. Normally, this boy would be seen singing Luis Aguilé's "Ciudad Solitaria," a song that speaks about loving someone and coping with his/her absence:

Todas las calles
Llenas de gente están
Y por el aire suena una música
Chicos y chicas van cantando
Llenos de felicidad
Mas la ciudad sin ti
Está solitaria

De noche salgo
Con alguien a bailar
Nos abrazamos
Pero todo sigue igual
Porque ningún cariño nuevo
Me ha podido hacer feliz
Mi corazón sin ti
Está solitario (Aguilé 1976)²⁵

The title of the *crónica*, as well as the last verses of the song in this fragment, anticipate an absence, as if something that once existed is today gone. No more

²⁵ See video clip on "Luis Aguilé - Ciudad Solitaria." *YouTube*, uploaded by Ave del Tiempo, 13 Dec. 2007, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sOzGGi9QrwE>

information is given yet somehow the writer prepares us to face a rupture later in the story. This is evidenced as he declares that without his friend the city is solitary.

One day, this young man decides to organise a night watch to protect a Ramona Parra mural painted on the school's façade.²⁶ No one was interested, except for Lemebel, who saw in this event a love opportunity. Showing up at night, he joined the young activist who was surprised and glad to see him:

Te vine a hacer compañía, compañero, dije, tiritando de tímido. Bienvenida sea su compañía contestaste, pasándome el pucho a medio consumir por tu boca jugosa. No fumo, te contesté con pudor. Entonces no fumaba, ni piteaba, ni jalaba, sólo amaba con la furia apasionada de los dieciséis años. Pueden venir los fachos. ¿No tienes miedo? Te contesté que no, temblando. Es por el frío, esta noche hace mucho frío. No me creíste, pero enlazaste tu brazo en mis hombros con un cálido apretón. (*Serenata* 38).

Lemebel continues to speak about this unforgettable night and shares details of this encounter, creating a romantic atmosphere that involves the reader and makes him/her a participant of that moment, as if becoming an indirect witness. Phrases like “Casi no sentía frío a tu lado,” “me fui relajando, adormilando en tu hombro,” or “volviste a cantar en mi oído y así pasaron las horas,” indeed contribute to creating that proximity, as they allow to imagine how such actions unfolded. Also, this experience is possible because of the narrator's candour, which unavoidably makes the reader feel empathic. Although the speaker seems to truly believe in a romantic outcome, the reader is perhaps more realistic and hesitant about it. This happens not only because of the story's adverse context, but also because readers are aware of the writer's usual pessimism and are somehow prepared for it. As it is a common characteristic in most of Lemebel's texts, success often leads to failure.

As expected, nothing happens between the two boys, demonstrating that probably, the romantic opportunity was only visualised in the narrator's mind. Meanwhile, the song kept playing in his ear during the following days, as if coming from his friend's voice, “como si me la cantaras sólo a mí” (*Serenata* 38). Sadly, the story unveils an unforeseen twist towards the end. The love illusion vanishes when his friend disappears after the brutal 1973's military overthrow: “Nunca más supe de ti. Pasaron los inviernos de tormenta rebalsando el Mapocho de cadáveres con un tiro en la frente” (39). This section is burdened with a strong emotional component that could possibly be transferred to a reader with a similar past experience. Following Massumi, the reader could probably live this connection in a physiological way, with physical reactions that could be interpreted as the language of the body speaking on behalf of his/her deepest emotions.

As per the song, we can see that the author clearly makes a connection between the lyrics and his friend's disappearance. But also, he absorbs the song's

²⁶ Ramona Parra is a brigade formed in 1968 by young artists from the Communist Party. It was highly popular in the 1970s, painting several iconic and colourful murals alluding to Allende's presidential program.

voice and makes it his own, altering its meaning and transforming it into a political statement, despite not being essentially political. This is indeed a characteristic of popular music because, as stated by David Hesmondhalgh, songs can be political as long as they develop “values and identities that feed into deliberation, democracy, and [public affairs] in substantial but rather indirect ways” (10).

“La ciudad sin ti,” same as “Qué pena que no me duela tu nombre ahora” as well as many other *crónicas*, are two texts where the writer’s emotional memory is guided and influenced by a musical memory. Initially, songs would seem to be placed along the texts as an add-on, adding the characteristic familiarity of popular music. Yet, in this section, we have demonstrated that songs in Lemebel’s *crónicas* are much more than that. Not only do they contribute to strengthening the connection between writer and reader, but also, they become an independent voice interlaced with the text’s discourse, strategically camouflaged, waiting for its meaning to be deciphered by a culturally competent reader.

Conclusion

Songs are an essential component in Lemebel’s *crónicas*. Current scholarly works, engaged with this topic, have mainly emphasised the use of lyrics as a strategic literary technique, where songs –as background music– would help to create a closer connection between writer and reader. While this is indeed a relevant contribution to understanding this intriguing phenomenon, it also opens the discussion to other areas, such as analysing the voice of lyrics and their respective interaction/interference with the literary discourse. This article has shown that songs are purposefully articulated in Lemebel’s *crónicas* in varied forms. Either because of their content or their cultural meaning, they become a crucial element for a fuller interpretation of the author’s work. Each song tells a story and that story is aligned to the text’s narrative, either directly or indirectly. In this article, we have provided an interpretation of how lyrics connect to four *crónicas* written by Lemebel, focusing on both their cultural and affective significance. This is an innovative approach that could serve to analyse other works of his authorship where songs are also a pivotal piece of the narration.

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