

REWRITING THE DEAD IN PEDRO LEMEBEL'S
"LAS AMAPOLAS TAMBIÉN TIENEN ESPINAS"
(1995)

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*Eroticism, it may be said, is assenting to
life up to the point of death.*

—Georges Bataille, *Eroticism*

“**L**A pena por el pene,” says the speaker of Pedro Lemebel’s violently erotic chronicle “Las amapolas también tienen espinas” (157). If this pen were not immediately evocative of the male member, the speaker’s alliterative verbal strokes make the comparison explicit: in Lemebel’s sentence “physical affliction” and the pen run in exchange for (“por”) the phallus. In a chronicle detailing the assignation and murder of a young Santiago *loca*, metaphor and verbal exchanges like this one “dress up” the text’s multiple, reticular meanings as much as they lay bare the tensions between desire and excess; attraction and seduction; deadly violence and the process of writing as representation. Pleasure and pain, for the speaker, are as tactile as they are gustatory, auditory, linguistic. Exploring how Lemebel brings representation and reinterpretation to an unnamed *loca*’s stabbing in his chronicle is also as much ethically important as it is fraught with pain when recognizing the material reality of homophobia in Santiago following the end of Chile’s military dictatorship (1973-90).

In my reading of Lemebel’s chronicle, I show how the pleasures and pains of reorienting a deadly event’s interpretation are evoked in different stylistic ways, reminiscent of the *The Pleasure of the Text* (1973)

Roland Barthes so evocatively writes about, as he reminds us that “pleasure’s force of *suspension* can never be overstated” (65, italics in original) and that “text” itself, “means *Tissue*,” is “worked out in a perpetual interweaving; lost in this tissue—this texture—the subject unmakes himself, like a spider dissolving in the constructive secretions of its web” (64, italics in original). Reorienting historical violence from remarkably distinct standpoints, Lemebel’s text provides routes for making, unmaking, and, indeed, thinking differently about sensational writings on the textured tissues of the body, gender, and (homo)sexual male violence.

Pedro Lemebel (1952–2015), to be sure, published and spoke publicly of the ecstasies, injuries, and troubles associated with gender, sex, violence, and death. Openly gay, he also ventured beyond the literary arts in order to create scenes in visual culture of the sexually marginal, acting out (on) the aesthetic obsessions of his writing: in performative interventions with Las Yeguas del Apocalipsis, in plays, videos, films, photography, and radio programs on the popular left-wing radio station Radio Tierra.¹ Lemebel’s work reveals the links between writing and

¹ For a summary of Lemebel’s literary works, see Walescka Pino-Ojeda, “Gay Proletarian Memory: the Chronicles of Pedro Lemebel.” *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies* 20.3 (2006): 395-406. Pino-Ojeda reminds us that Lemebel’s four collections of chronicles were preceded in 1986 by, “a book of short stories, *Incontables* (Editorial Ergo Sum)” and points out that Lemebel’s first two collections of chronicles were specifically about Chilean marginal figures: *La esquina*, “recounts recent Chilean history from the perspective of marginalized youngsters of the poor neighborhoods; *Loco afán: crónicas de sidario* (Mad Urge: AIDS Chronicles, LOM, 1996) focuses on cultural and political memories recounted from the perspective of gay marginal subjects, who participated as peripheral witnesses in casual events that, nonetheless, contain political relevance” (395). Though less has been written regarding Lemebel’s performative interventions, the Chilean documentary filmmaker Gloria Camiruagua (1941-2006) made a stunning documentary, *La última cena* (1989), which documents Pedro Lemebel, Francisco Casas, and Las Yeguas del Apocolipsis’s now infamous intervention in Santiago’s Calle San Camilo, a place well known for its prostitution at the time, yet now ravaged by the history of AIDS.

definitions of pleasure, pain, and violence, which he depicts while critiquing the ideals of democracy in his country of birth. Recognizing these broader trends of his artistic production, I home in on the rhetoric of pugilistic pleasures and pains in Lemebel's writing as it relates to desire and death on the nighttime Santiago streets and in popular news. Therein, my reading of Lemebel's piece drives at a problem of ethics in sensational reporting of "timely" information. In a story of desire and death, such a discussion is necessary, as, in the words of Freud, when speaking of Eros and Thanatos, the relationships between aggression, "instinctual renunciation," and masochism, "the origin of the ethical sense [is left] unexplained" ("Economic Problem" 283).² Yet, instead of writing only about the so-called "ethical sense" of narrating personal violence, I mean to speak also about the ethics of sensationalizing the "problem," so to speak, of "proper conduct"³ in Chile in the 1990s.

INTERLACED SUBJECTS: VOICES OF DEMOCRACY, DESIRE, AND THE SOUNDS OF LEMEBEL'S NEO-BAROQUE POETICS

Often laden with descriptions of erotic (mis)adventures, evocative linguistic transformations in the Chilean author's chronicles are rampant and raw, gustatory and transmutative. At times, they involve sex for money or, what I'd like to focus on here, the risk of death for pleasure, the cross-over for which Lemebel's central protagonist in the chronicle extends his effeminate *loca*, queen-like longing and his prostrate body for contact with a more masculine "chico" while "vampireando la noche por callejones, bajo puentes y parques, donde la oscuridad es una sábana negra que ahoga los suspiros" (157). One of nineteen chronicles published in Santiago's leftwing periodical *Página abierta* between 1991 and 1993, the piece was

² Freud argued that, concerning desire, "the first instinctual renunciation is enforced by external powers, and it is only this which creates the ethical sense, which expresses itself in conscience and demands a further renunciation of instinct" ("Economic Problem" 283).

³ See Brad Epps. "Proper Conduct: Reinaldo Arenas, Fidel Castro, and the Politics of Appearance." *The Journal of the History of Sexuality* 6.2 (1995): 231-83.

printed again in Lemebel's first collection of chronicles in 1995 under the title *La esquina es mi corazón*. Instead of depicting a cosmopolitan Chilean democracy of inclusion in the post-dictatorship nation, the chronicle graphically imagines how Chile's landscape in political transition commits those on the margins of society to a neoliberal discourse in which gay sex is reconstituted by the logics of capitalism.

Pleasure in "Las amapolas" is embodied by the interplay of masculine and feminine discourse. It is set out from the beginning in the depiction of a consumptive and parasitic, vampiric desire for sex just as it is by the desire to complement pleasure with the exchange of money. The chronicle shows this relationship in the encounter between the *loca* and what Lemebel's speaker calls "el péndex," or the *crío*, an immature, unworldly person. As I will argue, in geographic, personal, and public terms, instead of functioning only as a description of a pleasurable encounter between two bodies, the assignation between the two men becomes violent precisely when and because corporal desires are overcome by the need to eradicate shame and the emblem of unabashed and unrestrained longing embodied in the figure of the *loca*.

The text is framed, first, in a way to highlight the relationships between time, geography, and desire. Its opening sentence makes this clear, stating that, "La ciudad en fin de semana transforma sus calles en flujos que rebasan la libido" (157). As the workweek ends, the city "transforms" its streets into "flows" or rushes of libido, and the fluctuating transition from work to leisure takes over the bodies that fill and travel through them. The text's temporal framework suggests an equally fluctuating understanding of the geographies of desire whose circuits are controlled, in large part, by the predominant modes of labor within and outside of the city. It brings to light, too, the lesser-seen nocturnal geographies and "crossroads" of longing for Santiago's urban proletariat—both during and after General Augusto Pinochet's violent dictatorship—thereby elucidating a vision of the contradictions of Chile's neoliberal "development" in the context of globalized speculation. Absent from the text's description, Chile's affluent consumer society nevertheless creates a geography that continues to expel and contain on its margins significant

populations of the poor and disenfranchised who emigrate on weekends,⁴ as Lemebel's narrator says, "al centro, en busca de una boca chupona que más encima les tire unos pesos" (157). After depicting the scene's nighttime geography, the narrator focuses on the characters who enter it. Figured only once in the gerund form of vampire, those that inhabit this Chilean nightscape come alive, moving as if animated by the possibility of pleasures that invite poor youth to enter the city's inner network of trade.

Given the variety of terms used in common vernacular to describe gay men, it is difficult to assume a simple binary between the consumptive, vampiric dominant male and the more effeminate, passive queen. On the surface, the words indicate sex roles between the two. While Murray and Dynes define the *vampiro* as a hustler and as the male figure who is often understood to take the penetrative role in gay sex (188), their lexicon states that the alternative figure of the *loca* is a "crazy girl" who takes the opposite role (186). Even so, at least initially, both *loca* and *chico* are encapsulated in the description of their ambulations through the city. They are spurred as much by lust as by hope for the chance encounter with money. Muddying the clarity with which we understand the vampire, Epps reminds us in his reading of Luis Zapata's *El vampiro de la Colonia Roma* (1979), that, however we conceive of it, "pleasure is hardly easy . . . for it is accompanied by exploitation and is consistent with one of the more colloquial meanings of 'vampiro', which, like '*pícaro*', refers to a 'persona que explota cruelmente a otras'" ("Vampires" 104). In Lemebel's chronicle, the act of cruising the nighttime streets is influenced on both sides of the masculine-feminine gender divide by hopes for financial gain; the desires for pleasure parallel the craving to gain fiscally from physical

⁴ For more on this subject, see Peter Winn's edited volume *Victims of the Chilean Miracle: Workers and Neoliberalism in the Pinochet Era, 1973-2002* (Durham: Duke UP, 2004). In the volume's introduction, Winn writes the following: "In 1998 Pinochet's retirement and arrest brought his era to a close and the Asian crisis brought Chile's economic boom to an end. The Argentine crisis of 2001-2002 and Pinochet's definitive retirement from public life during those years confirmed that both the economic miracle and his political career were history. Still, though the Pinochet era and the neoliberal miracle might be over, their impact on Chile's workers and their organizations remains" (12).

exchange. Sex, in this sense, becomes defined temporally, by leisure and by the free enjoyment of pleasure while it is simultaneously deemed a monetized service to occur when other menial labors are stalled.

In this framework, queer desire's phantom consumption, like the phantom figure of the vampire, raises its head when least moderated or observed in the light of day by the norms of Chilean bourgeois culture. Defying a coterminous logic of bourgeois propriety in pleasurable interaction between men and women, the actions described in the search for gay sex simultaneously reproduce a cost-benefit rationale. On the one hand, pleasure occurs only on the weekends (when not working), and, on the other hand, economic gain drives how one seeks pleasure and with whom. In Chile's post-dictatorship history, even outside the confines of day-to-day labor, men having sex with other men in Lemebel's chronicles are not necessarily liberated from the dream to be free from financial longing. Describing Chile's transition into democracy, Tomás Moulian explains that "ese bloque de poder . . . realizó la revolución capitalista, construyó esta sociedad de mercados desregulados, de indiferencia política, de individuos competitivos realizados o bien compensados a través del placer de consumir o más bien de exhibirse consumiendo" (18).

While pleasure is felt, according to Moulian, in an emotive state of expenditure (i.e., "the using up" of a resource), the delight in economic disbursement (for the sake of acquisition) lies also in a social contract in which one's exhibition of consumption is perceived and (we might assume) approved by the tastes of others. Taking place in the shadows of night, the consumption of male desire within "Las amapolas" mirrors these modes of expenditure while, importantly, such male desires are not condoned by the tastes of others and therefore have no place (in private or public) to be experienced or seen. Should we doubt the ubiquity of this urban concern for the place of gay sex, we may see its subject in other chronicles in *La esquina*, like, for example, "Las anacondas en el parque," which describes public trysts between gay men in Santiago's Parque Forestal, but which also ends with the death of one of the chronicle's primary characters.

Looking more closely at the two figures in "Las amapolas," we observe that their desires for physical contact and property ownership reflect the concerns of Moulian's text, as the hopes for consumptive

pleasure in Lemebel's chronicle are embedded in the characters' nighttime searching. We see this more explicitly in the figure of the *péndex* when the narrator suggests, for example, that he exchanges gestures with his counterpart *loca* and finally consents to walking with him not only for sex, but for the limited-time chance of inhabiting a wealthier space. "A cambio," says the narrator, "el péndex se acomoda el bulto y se hace el simpático esperando que el destino [de los dos] sea un súper departamento con mucho whisky, música y al final una buena paga" (159). However freed the two are from menial chores of work, the *péndex* agrees to the assignation under the imagined precepts of gratification located in a private geography defined by property ownership. The *loca's* desire for sex in itself, alternatively, is not freed from this discourse as it is enabled by the *péndex's* expectation of momentary pleasure in a private space.

The desire to inhabit a space of greater wealth does not, nevertheless, eradicate the desire for physical pleasure. As both the *loca* and his counterpart have no home in which to have sex and no money to rent a room, the sexual encounter occurs in a, "sitio abandonado, lleno de basuras y perros muertos" (159). Rather than turning his head, the chronicler leads us deeper into this nocturnal place of consumption; he speaks as if he were a participatory witness to the "obscenities" present in an abandoned location. Despite a longing for money, physical longing momentarily overcomes alternative desires for privacy and occupies a liminally occluded space: in an obscured location nevertheless dedicated to the dead and to general excess, to objects that are deemed disposable, whose utility is negligent. Deemed worthy only of the spaces outside of private space, these objects are linked to our public knowledge of the sensationalized story that ensues.

Rather than simply fascinating the privileged reader with a voyeuristic project of "slumming," the illumination of the darkened area serves to represent the possibility of pleasure, through physical contact and linguistic embellishment vis-à-vis the layering and transmutation of metaphor. The subsequent description moves to physical undressing and linguistic dressing up, "donde la loca suelta la tarántula por la mezclilla erecta del marrueco. Allí el pequeño hombrecito, arropado en el fuego de esos dedos, se entrega al balanceo genital de la marica ternera mamando,

diciendo: Pónemelo un ratito, la puntita no más. ¿Querís?” (159-60). For the narrator, the disrobed “tarántula”—pulled free from the *chico*’s clothes—becomes a “little man” clothed in the fire of the *loca*’s fingers. As the naked phallus is described, it, too, is clothed in metaphor. It becomes an arachnid while the speaker describes the *loca*, in the act of oral sex, as a “marica ternera mamando.” In a remarkable metatextual move, the enunciation of these words in Spanish makes the speaker, reader, and *loca* textually interlaced verbal actors. With the nasal consonant of the alliterative “m,” we can imagine the speaker’s or reader’s lips puckering while describing the *loca*, too, as moving his lips, sucking, puckering, speaking. Emphasizing this textual pairing (of speaker, reader, and *loca*), the speaker’s grammar separates with a comma the two gerundive verbs that describe physical action and verbal creation—“mamando, diciendo”—thereby emphasizing ongoing aural/oral/lingual movement. Speaking, writing, and re-reading about sex become interlocked activities as the speaker foregrounds them visually. Along with the speaker’s description of intimate contact while wondering the streets, language and metaphor appear to be mobile, deterritorialized, as the *loca* and *chico* morph with rapidly changing, accumulating metaphors and as the two characters communicate with words, between words, with sounds, and with gesture. The text, as a consequence, suggests that the ecstatic, metaphysical experience of desire is as relevant in this nighttime scene as the moment of carnal contact. Verbal creation, an act of poetics, is at much at stake as a passing encounter.

In the continuing assignation, further verbal accumulation about disrobing occurs. The *loca* asks to have sex, and the speaker says:

Y sin esperar respuesta se baja los pantalones y se lo enchufa sola moviéndose, sudando en el ardor del empalme que gime: Ay, que duele, no tan fuerte, es muy grande, despacito. Que te gusta, que te parto, cómetelo todo, que ya viene, que me voy, no te mavái, que me fui. Así, así calientito, el chico derrama su leche en el torniquete trasero, hasta la última gota espermea el quejido. (160)

Expenditure in this description is both physical and linguistic, and it mirrors a neo-baroque style common in works by other queer Latin American writers (José Lezama Lima, Reinaldo Arenas, Severo Sarduy, for

example). Following Severo Sarduy's definition, the neo-baroque becomes a mode of apparent verbal overflow, where language resists economization, in order to "amenazar . . . la economía burguesa" and function under a different linguistic paradigm: "malgastar, dilapidar, derrochar lenguaje únicamente en función de placer" (209). For his part, the narrator's description similarly unfolds with seeming lack of verbal economy to communicate meaning in multiple registers. It is pierced by grammar and made musical with phonic cadences and rhythmic repetitions; the speaker's words and silences convey phonetic sensation, furthermore, through perforations of breath interspersed with dialogue. First, affective communication is nonverbal, onomatopoeic: the *loca* exclaims, "ay," then speaks to the *chico*, telling him to slow down. Second, in staccato-like phrases, separated not by periods but by commas and the anaphoristically repeated word "que," the *chico* speaks back: "Que te gusta, que te parto, cómetelo todo, que ya viene, que me voy, no te mavaí, que me fui." In the words "que" and "cómetelo," the cadenced repetition of hard consonant [k] sounds—what phonologists call a voiceless velar plosive—mirror what one could imagine as the rhythmic sounds created during the moment described. The speaker's words create what Barthes calls "a dual posture, a dual production—of language and of music" (*The Rustle of Language* 181). Corresponding perhaps with the stabbing to come, the *chico's* linguistic thrusts resonate with the sensation of physical pleasure and pain. They functioning as declarative illocutionary speech acts⁵—in saying "que te gusta, que te parto," for example, the speaker communicates anaphoristically to declare the intersections of pleasure and pain in the moment of physical action.

In all this, it is important to remember that the narrator-observer speaks, too, as if intimately aware of/present at the tryst. The insertion of the third person narrator to describe the encounter in metaphorical terms—"el chico derrama su leche"—reminds us of the chronicler's privileged position as re-creator of the verbally painted scene and the reader's coterminous involvement in following textual cues to stitch the

⁵ See John R. Searle, "A Classification of Illocutionary Acts." *Language in Society* 5.1 (1976): 1-23.

story's meaning together. Before this moment, rather than identifying speakers in the act of coitus, the narrator leaves out signals that might identify them more clearly, creating the sense that we must infer action from dialogue rather than from depiction. The text is reminiscent of Jean Genet's *The Thief's Journal* (1949), in which the narrator writes that "Erotic play discloses a nameless world which is revealed by the nocturnal language of lovers. It is whispered into the ear at night in a hoarse voice. At dawn it is forgotten. Repudiating the virtues of your world, criminals hopelessly agree to organize the universe"(9-10). Similarly, Lemebel's speaker invites us to hear a nocturnal language organized by nameless characters and sounds from bodies not always directly identified as *loca* or *chico*. Shifting perspective first from commentator to *loca*, then from *loca* to *chico*, and then, back to commentator, we observe the self-implicating force in which the observer (also, the reader) is othered even as made participatory listener and voyeur.

VIOLENCE AFTER THE FACT

Despite finding a place for their tryst, the desire for homosexual intimacy only briefly obscures a predominant distaste that deems such an encounter repulsive to the *chico*. Afterwards, "solo entonces la mira sin calentura, como si de un momento a otro la fragua del ensarte se congelara en un vaho sucio que nubla el baldío, la sábana nupcial donde la loca jadeando pide aún 'otro poquito'" (160). Though the *chico* is no longer interested in the *loca*, the narrator's use of metaphor does not cease, but rather animates the individuation with which the narrator describes the characters and with which the *chico* observes the *loca*. On the one hand, we see the *chico's* cold lack of desire for the *loca* and, on the other, we have the *loca's* unsatisfied yearning for continued contact. Observing this dichotomy, Lemebel's language focuses now on the metaphor of the body described, not in the mind of the *chico* but in the mind of the narrator/*loca*, who says,

Partido en dos su cielo rajo, calado y espeluznante, que venga el burro urgente a deshojar su margarita. Que vuelva a regar su flor homófaga goteando blondas en el aprieta pétalos babosos, su gineceo de trasnoche incubaba semillas adolescentes. Las germina el

ardor fecal de su trompa caníbal. Su amapola erizo que puja a tajo abierto aún descontenta. Vaciada por el saque, un especio estelar la pena por dentro. (160-161)

Attributing to the body both earthly and celestial figurations, the speaker employs metaphor in the manner of Jean Genet's anti-hero in the *The Thief's Journal*, again, who writes, "should I have to portray a convict—or a criminal—I shall so bedeck him with flowers that, as he disappears beneath them, he will himself become a flower." For the speaker in the chronicle, the scatological mixes with the florid and reflects the heavens. In an extended conceit, the point of contact between the two becomes a bed of flowers: "magnolia terciopela," "margarita," "flor homófoga," "trompa caníbal," and "amapola erizo." Within these figurations, flowers are not just tender, but are, according to the speaker, to be ravaged, depetaled. A flower is not just passive (to be seen and "plucked"), furthermore, but it is consumptive of and desirous of other flowers ("homofága" derives, of course, from "homo" and "phagia," meaning "eating [cannibalistically] of a [specified] type or substance") ("Phagy"). Matter, following this metaphoric reasoning, is not just the body's waste, but germinated, "ardor fecal de su trompa caníbal." And the "poppy," about which I will say more later, is not just red in the speaker's mind, but prickly, subtly menacing in its tiny protrusions.

After their brief encounter, we see how its effects make the *chico* interpret the *loca* by means of the "el esfínter marchito" "iluminado por ausencia." In the mind of the *chico*, it is, according to the speaker, like a "molusco concheperla que perdió su joya en mitad de la fiesta...solo le queda la huella de la perla, como un boquerón que irradia la memoria del nácar sobre la basura" (161). Contrasting floral metaphors with metaphors of absence and deterioration, the chronicle's narrator takes on the voice of the *péndex's* post-coital mind:

preguntándose por qué lo hizo, por qué le vino ese asco con él mismo, esa hiel amarga en el tira y afloja con el reloj pulsera de la loca que le decía: Es un recuerdo de mi mamá. La loca que chillaba como un varraco cuando vio el filo de la punta, esa insignificante cortaplumas que él usaba para darse los brillos. Que jamás había cortado a nadie pero la loca gritaba tanto, se fue de escándalo y

tuvo que ensartarla una y otra vez en el ojo, en la guata, en el costado, donde cayera para que se callara. (161-62)

While the chronicle's depiction of the preceding moment is indeed graphic, the transition to subsequent stabbing, grammatically, is nearly seamless, and the violence that follows fills the chronicle's remaining pages. Despite never having cut someone in the past, the *chico* is overcome with disgust and uncertainty. Incapable of explaining why he has just had sex with the *loca*, "sex" becomes an unnamed signifier when the narrator describes him, "preguntándose por qué lo hizo." Following this question, the speaker describes disgust as a feeling that accompanies the body of the *loca* and comes precisely "con él mismo." Seeing the body of the *loca* inspires in the *péndex* a feeling of bitter bile that comes also with the *loca*, with the ebb and flow of the two bodies interrupted by the vision of a watch: "esa hiel amarga en el tiro y afloja con el reloj pulsera que le decía: Es un recuerdo de mi mamá." The grammar of the speaker's sentence moves from two questions to an object on the *loca* that interrupts a physical feeling of pleasure with language and nostalgia for the mother. Evoking human particularity, the watch and memory of the mother are the objective links that lead to the *loca's* stabbing. Animated by the sound of the *loca's* screaming like a pig and the site of the "reloj pulsera," the unnamed poor, young queen becomes no longer an object of pleasure or imagined capital gain, but a body illuminated by withering absence and a memory, asking, in the present, for more. Mutilating the defiant *loca* with a knife (penetrating her again as if a vampire extracting blood), the *chico* kills her while (and *because*) she refuses to be silent, "gritaba tanto."

In the chronicle's following pages, sound and metaphor are not simply tools used to delineate poetically an otherwise occluded and intimately pleasurable moment. They illuminate, rather, both the body's mutilation and the speaker's capacity to record a rhetoric of stylized violence. Despite being stabbed, the *loca*, in his narrated death, undergoes an ongoing process of *not* falling: "pero no caía ni se callaba nunca el maricón porfiado" (162). The *loca's* screams are, in the text, phonic artifacts of resistance to violence while the speaker employs metaphor to change the mutilating knife into a sexual and writerly tool. The speaker declares, "que se chupa el puñal como un pene pidiendo más, 'otra vez,

papito', la última que me muero" (162). Conflating "pene" with "puñal," the speaker's erotic description of a violent act against the body shows how the *chico's* murder of the *loca*, rather than cleansing him of his previous sexual act, is symbolically embedded in a destructive act driven by sexual anxiety. Linking this act of violence to erotic exchange shows how quickly a body can be read differently, perversely, for stabbing: "Como si el estoque fuera una picana eléctrica y sus descargas corvaran la carne tensa, estirándola, mostrando nuevos lugares vírgenes para otra cuchillada. Sitios no vistos en la secuencia de poses y estertores de la loca teatrera en su agonía" (162). Whereas the body was previously one of pleasure and intimate contact, the stabbing transfigures the body of the *loca* as one worthy of destruction in newly seen parts of the body.

As I will show, the conditional phrase in the text—"como si fuera"—further stylizes the body's mutilation while amplifying the rhetorical tension between mutilator and "resisting" *loca*. Adding metaphor to metaphor, the speaker describes the text and body of the *loca*, not as an abject figure but as a famous actress, in the speaker's words:

posando Monroe al flashazo de los cortes, quebrándose Marilyn a la navaja Polaroid que abre la gamuza del lomo modelado a tajos por la moda del destripe. La star top en su mejor desfile de vísceras frescas, recibiendo la hoja de plata como un trofeo. (162)

In its grotesquerie, the *loca* becomes Marilyn Monroe showing "fresh entrails." Equally important, the knife paints up rather than simply undoing the body. "Casi ¡casual!" the knife, instead of immediately ending the *loca's* life quickly cuts, "como si fuera una coincidencia, un leve rasguño un punto en la media, una rasgadura del atuendo Cristián Dior que en púrpura la estila" (163). In this rhetoric of enumeration, the text amplifies the ways in which the knife acts as a stylistic marker, and, as a result, "la marica maniqué luciendo el look siempre viva en la pasarela del charco...irónica en el gesto cinematográfico ofrece sus labios machucados al puño que los clausura" (163). The site of erotic stimulation that had initially begged for more, continues to offer itself up, and the *chico* becomes the character who attempts to silence it while, "nuevamente erecto, sigue desguazando la charcha gardenia de la carne" (164). The attempt to silence the *loca* reflects and is embedded in the language of

excess even as this language describes an act of veiling in the following sentences:

Un velo turbio lo encabrita por linchar al maricón hasta el infinito.
Por todos lados, por el culo, por los fracasos, por los pacos y sus patadas, por cada escupo devolver un beso sangriento diciendo con los dientes apretados: ¿No queríai otro poquito? (164)

In a chain of accumulating imagery, the request for further pleasure leads to the final scene of murder. The *chico*, reiterating the words of the *loca*, has the last words, but only by suffusing them with an ironic rhetorical question: didn't you want more?

THE ETHICS OF SENSATIONALISM OR MAKING A PROFIT

As we recognize the *chico's* ironic inversion of the *loca's* request for more, we might also recognize the narrator's parodic inversion of the narratives that previously described the murder scene. The story of sex and death becomes one about reading and representing an amplified feeling of pleasure and deep resentment, communicated and embellished in verbal play and repetition. Indeed, the ability to provide more textual depiction, to articulate and replay an act of sexual violence, is at the heart of the story, as the *chico* leaves the *loca* for dead, bleeding for the authorities to find and the popular news to ignore, sensationalize, or condemn. Himself also silent, unable to say why he had sex with the *loca*, the vampiric masculine *péndex* is a figure who loses his ability to make meaning of an event precisely when his sexual desire has been satisfied and the value of his object of affection is seen as being emptied, equivalent to the consumed and abandoned objects surrounding him.

Despite the vividness with which the *loca* is stabbed in the eye, stomach, and back, the chronicle's ending speaks on behalf of the *péndex* and *loca*. Placing the *péndex* and wider social paradigms on a level playing field, the narrator suggests, finally, that both are implicated in the death of the *loca*. In the daily news,

el suceso no levanta polvo porque un juicio moral avala estas prácticas. Sustenta el ensañamiento en el titular del diario que lo vocea como un castigo merecido: "murió en su ley", "El que la

busca la encuentra”, “Lo mataron por atrás”, y otros tantos clichés con que la homofobia de la prensa amarilla acentúa las puñaladas. (164)

When inflected with violence and murder, Lemebel’s poetically embellished testimony shows how public (misrepresentations of) sex can become, particularly as they feed off common vernacular, even vampirically, while reiterating “tantos clichés” that laud the *loca’s* death. The chronicle shows, too, how the deaths of gay men in Santiago might turn profitable in a public realm that sells homophobic slurs in its anecdotal titles. In doing so, “Las amapolas” implicates in its reading those economic and cultural forces that make the *loca’s* depiction and experience abject and marketable objects of distaste: improper, repellant, laughable, and financially profitable.

In post-dictatorship Chile, to be sure, the concern for remembering those lost under Pinochet’s regime is ongoing and might inflect the cultural productions of artists, journalists, and those in power capable of rendering popular memory public. In Nelly Richard’s words,

la pregunta por el recuerdo concierne el nexo entre *memoria, lenguaje y trizaduras de la representación*. Pero el recuerdo necesita de superficies de inscripción donde grabarse para que la relación viva entre marca, textura y acontecimiento, libere nuevos efectos de sentido. (15)

For Richard, the concern for remembering the tortured and dead is an ethical one founded in representations of an event in the past. As with Lemebel, the problem of memory concerns also how contemporary popular culture creates and circulates such representations. Richard expresses this concern in the following question:

Dónde encontrar estas superficies de inscripción si el Chile transicional ha dejado a las secuencias rotas de la historia sin articulaciones narrativas ni conexiones de relato; si el rigor ético de la demanda de justicia contenida en los retratos en blanco y negro de los detenidos-desaparecidos es diariamente condenado por flujos publicitarios declaradamente hostiles a su dramática del sentido? (15)

Different from Richard, Lemebel's text does not address directly those lost during the dictatorship, but those who, despite the present democracy, continue to be condemned by the same voices that preoccupy Richard. In this sense, Lemebel's text ventures beyond Richard's question regarding the past to demonstrate that the same ethical dilemma of representation concerning the dictatorship continues, in the present, to shape mainstream cultural mores regarding who, indeed, belongs in Chile's newly burgeoning republic.

The fact that Lemebel's title concerning the "event" that others decry is so different from that of a mainstream newspaper reveals an impulse not necessarily to eradicate the chronicle's sensuality or impulse toward memory. In the narrator's words,

el tema rezuma muchas lecturas y causas que siguen girando fatídicas en torno al deambular de las locas por ciertos lugares. Sitios baldíos que la urbe va desmantelando para instalar nuevas construcciones en los rescoldos del crimen. Teatros lúgubres donde la violencia contra homosexuales excede la simple riña, la venganza o el robo. Carnicerías del resentimiento social que se cobran el en pellejo más débil, el más expuesto. El corazón gitano de las locas que buscan una gota de placer en las espinas de un rosal prohibido. (164-65)

Resentment, effectively understood as "feeling back" (from *re* + *sentir*), becomes the feeling that animates multiple textual reproductions to sell a story wrongly told: first, in the voice of the *chico* and second, in the voice of the press. Textual reproduction, through resounding feeling and resounding multiple readings and re-readings, becomes, in the words of Brad Epps (reading Goytisoló through Barthes), the "*texte de jouissance*, or text of bliss . . . that Barthes describes as toppling the cultural, historical, and psychological values of the reader and as producing a crisis in language" that is, nevertheless, also in Goytisoló and, I would argue, in Lemebel, "a comforting faith in the resurrection of the word" (*Significant* 158). Despite the butchering that Lemebel details—a butchering that is, to be sure, an *effect* of ongoing "social resentment" felt against the cruising *loca*—its depiction ironically reveals, through embellished description, the resurrection of an alternative narrative that celebrates the *loca*'s life.

To be sure, in its biting social critique and celebration of the marginal gay figure, even Lemebel's title does not veer altogether from comforting sensation. It rather reanimates sensation's cutting force in the figure of a flower (visually sensuous in itself) and in a curious claim: that poppies, too, have thorns. In comparing the rose and poppy, Duncan-Jones writes, "though its stem is rough and hairy, the poppy can only by means of poetic licence [sic] be described as 'hanging on thorns' in any way comparable with roses" (524).⁶ Lemebel's certainly phallic and metonymic invocation of a figure *like* a rose renames the symbols and rhetorical paths a queer writer might employ in imagining and describing (sometimes) unwanted scenes of pain and pleasure. The act of associating the rose's thorns with those of another flower—or likening the rose to something else—brings to mind Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, in which Juliet, exasperated by the trials of family conflict and family names enacts the powers of mythopoesis, exclaiming, "A rose by any other name would smell as sweet." Following a history of flower metaphors, Lemebel's statement implies a similar desire to see the world and read the scene of desire differently: not to cancel it or eliminate its possibility, but to narrate it through renaming, thereby destabilizing language and re-signifying the object of desire. Lemebel, perhaps recognizing the fatal end of those like Juliet, is nevertheless, not an idealist in the power of depicting corporal, textual, historical destruction in renaming. "Las amapolas" never condemns homosexual sex, but does recognize the sensual and deadly dangers that might arise when it becomes public and a site of interpretive pleasure.

Such dangers are not only the loss of life, but continued social condemnation well beyond the *loca's* death. Lemebel's implied comparison to a rose, whose thorns are emblematic of love's perils, recalls, in this vein, Antonio Machado's poem "Yo voy soñando caminos," in which the poetic voice confesses the central problem of attempting altogether to eradicate love's pain: "En el corazón tenía / la espina de una pasión; / logré arrancármela un día: / ya no siento el corazón." Without

⁶ Katherine Duncan-Jones does not mention the prickly poppy species, whose cactus-like stems are, indeed, thorny, but whose location in Arizona makes them an unlikely subject of Lemebel's chronicle.

the flower's thorns, not only does the speaker eliminate passion's burning pain, but all feeling he might have of his heart. When reading Lemebel's text—one whose subject is sex, but whose focus is more graphically concerned with the pains of humility, loss, and murder—we see, too, that the perils of social condemnation are as much relevant as the characters' desires to experience pleasure. Likewise, the desires of the *péndex* and of those who wish to eliminate the queer object of desire are as much troubling dangers as the desire for sex in Santiago's city streets.

Apart from its form, the red hue of poppies corresponds also to that of the rose. Yet its symbolism has become evocative more so of battlefields and their fallen dead; reminiscent of a plume of blood, a poppy is therefore a reminder of those lost while its seeds, for those who consume them, enhance forgetting ("Poppy" n.p.). Known for their medicinal alkaloids, poppies offer the capacity not to enhance feeling and bring about ecstasy, but to desensitize and allow their users to escape into sleep, dream, and, when taken in excess, even death.⁷ The capacity to desensitize, threatens, as Machado reminds us, the very death of feeling linked so closely with desire and pleasure. As such, while considering Lemebel's text, the multiple dangers of pleasure and pain function as much as textual reminders of the various ways in which we might read and remember an event as traumatic or sensationalized as that of a man's sexual encounter or another's homicide. The reproduction of desire or of corporal/textual annihilation, too, becomes tethered to the process of

⁷ Duncan-Jones writes that, "the poppy...was associated with transience and frailty. Its Greek name, rheas, was given 'because the flour falleth away hastily', and its chief 'virtue', as is well known even today, was to induce sleep and oblivion, or, in overdose, death. The poet's object of ensuring the continuance of 'beauty's rose' would surely be quickly defeated if, disappointingly, the youth should prove to be a mere 'canker bloom', a gaudy but short-lived weed appearing at harvest-time which affords neither nourishment nor lasting merit, and is not only soon forgotten but in itself induces forgetfulness" (524).

attempting to deconstruct a dominant homophobic narrative. In Epps's words,

in a move that exposes the underside of Deleuze and Guattari's schizoanalysis and that gestures towards the degree zero of morality, Sade takes the impossibility of utter destruction as the stimulus for increasingly bizarre partial destructions. Body upon body, destruction in Sade is a process of accumulation and approximation. (*Significant* 158)

Vividly re-framing the imagined, mutilated body of the *loca*, Lemebel's text enacts a "partial" mutilation of tabloid stories and homophobic critiques in order, also, to create a new approximation to the original murder.

CONCLUSIONS: ON TIME AND WRITING BACK

Lest we accuse Lemebel of being complicit in a popular newspaper's game of commodified sense and sensationalism, we might celebrate his destabilization of published phrases that commemorate the *loca's* death. In sync with the purpose of the chronicle—*chronicle* coming from the Greek *khronikos*, remitting to "time" and its timely concerns—the piece animates and offers to the public sphere a too common real-life occurrence of homophobic violence Chile saw and has continued to see in its more recently publicized story concerning the beating and murder of the 24 year-old gay man, Daniel Zamudio, in 2012.⁸ But rather than reporting only what's seen in daylight in the event's aftermath, rather than investigating and giving account only to the facts of what occurred, chronologically, before and after the queen's murder, Lemebel's news interjects an alternative mode and poetics with which we might write about and interpret the encounter. Out of step with the mainstream newspaper's titles, Lemebel's narrative speaks *after* their publication while speaking back to and about them and documenting their presence in the present tense ("el suceso no levanta polvo porque un juicio moral avala estas prácticas"). Lemebel's shift in tone at this point in the text (from narrator of a private event to ethical judge of a public event of published texts)

⁸ See Rodrigo Fluxá, *Solos en la noche. Zamudio y sus asesinos* (Providencia: Editorial Catalonia, 2014).

becomes as much a narrative interjection as it is an explicit ethical condemnation of the “clichés con que la homofobia de la prensa amarilla acentúa las puñaladas.”

More than newly documenting the scene of a crime, the interjection functions as a metaleptic interpretation of past events that splinters understandings of chronological time, speaking back, but also speaking forward to how such events might be read in the future. In Lee Edelman’s words, such a reading in psychoanalysis,

not only theorizes about but also operates by means of the (re)construction or reinterpretation of earlier experiences in ways that evoke the temporal logic distinctive of deferred action; and as a result of what Laplanche and Pontalis describe as the “unevenness of its temporal development,” human sexuality constitutes the most significant arena in which the effects of deferred action, or *Nachträglichkeit*, come into play. (96)

Explicitly not a short story, the reanimation of a scene of sex and violence—absent in the story a more widely read newspaper “covers”—offers not only a vividly altered narration of historical events, but what Edelman calls, “the determinate relationship of cause and effect” (96). The cause of the *loca*’s murder, as I have tried to argue, is as much the *péndex*’s knife as the clichés that celebrate his death after the fact. The timeliness of Lemebel’s chronicle—also not a newspaper article—therefore permits the author to rewrite the social causes that incite, enable, and celebrate the deaths of marginal characters acting on their desires. It suggests a belief, nevertheless, that tastes for such a death might also be condemned and altered.

It is relevant to remember, furthermore, that the chronicle is dedicated to the now deceased orphan transsexual Miguel Ángel Poblete (visionary of Mother Mary’s decrees against the Catholic Church’s hierarchy during the Pinochet regime, as Esteban Larraín’s film, *La pasión de Michelangelo* [2013], shows us). This dedication marks the chronicle as one that works to disrupt and denounce the hierarchy of economic mores that codify and exacerbate violent homophobic pecking orders of class and gender within poor gay communities. The text does so, as Epps might suggest, by setting up a rough equivalency, a crossover of sorts, between

naming and killing (“La ética” 145). It brings to light Santiago’s historic scars in the representation of the desires of poor promiscuous gay men in the protracted aftermath of Chile’s dirty wars. The naming and depiction of queer encounters works in defiance of a conservative, bourgeois culture of commodification while “nurturing,” as Epps writes more generally, a democracy that benefits from, but does not attempt to assimilate into a monolithically defined body, “una gran diversidad de prácticas, experiencias e ideas, personas y partes, entre ellas las de la formación socio-sexual más asociada a la promiscuidad” (“La ética” 146).⁹

Altogether aware of aging and dying, Lemebel creates his own promiscuous neo-baroque style that decorates, decomposes, and memorializes the bodies of marginal figures. His text speaks in multiple ways for remembrance while condemning the gendered paradigms that threaten a sense of participatory governance and democracy that one, like Lemebel, might dream for in a post-dictatorship, post-dirty war regime. In the figure of the blood-sucking vampire, the living dead, Lemebel’s chronicle provides a contestatory ethic of naming the subjects of desire and the place where discourse on gender and neoliberalism intersect, describing unseen circuits of consumption and expenditure in what may appear to be obscene or violent stories yet to be sold.

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⁹ Epps writes that “la ética de la promiscuidad supone, pues, una heterogeneización de la moral, de la democracia y de la moral de la democracia” (“La ética” 146).

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