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Unveiling the Perpetrator's Gaze in Pedro Lemebel's Novel Tengo miedo torero

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Abstract. In the last decades, there has been a gradual shift in memory studies to approach traumatic events from the perpetrator's view, rather than the victim's. While this has been possible in some contexts – such as that of World War II – due to the availability of incriminatory material, it has been unfeasible in others because of its inexistence. In Chile, for example, the testimony of the dictatorship's top authority Augusto Pinochet is unavailable because of his denial to accept responsibility in the country's genocide, an aspect that has hindered victims from understanding his criminal motivations. When such is the case, we argue that fictional narratives may become a suitable way to recreate unknown events and thus facilitate a more coherent narrative of the past. We aim to demonstrate this by analysing the articulation of fictional dialogues uttered by Pinochet in the novel *Tengo miedo torero* (2001) by Chilean writer Pedro Lemebel.

Keywords: perpetrator, Chile, Pedro Lemebel, Pinochet, fiction, memory

The perpetrator's gaze: The Nazi regime

Traumatic memory has been globally and locally documented in uncountably many historical stories, photographs, films, fictional literature, plays, performances and survivors' testimonies, dealing with painful stories of torture, abuse and death (Jelin 2002: 80). While these atrocities have been historically approached from the victims' viewpoint, in the last decades, a gradual shift to explore them "from the perpetrator's perspective" has arisen (Canet 2019: 804–805). Whereas this method acknowledges the complexity of assuming the offender's position, it also considers it necessary to have a broader and more complete understanding of past events. Fernando Canet purports that reflecting on memory from the perpetrator's viewpoint is not only useful because "it exposes the administration's guilt, but also because it shows the harmful consequences of participating in abuses and can play an educational role that might help to prevent viewers from repeating the same behaviour in the same circumstances" (*ibid*. 808).

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One way to access the perpetrator's view is through photographs. During the Third Reich, photographs were indeed relevant and used both frequently and strategically. Not only did they serve propaganda purposes, but also allowed Nazi officers to keep an undercover record of their supremacy over prisoners. Looking at these images may be a shocking experience because of witnessing the miserable conditions in which people lived and died. Yet, it may be a useful way to recapture memory and thus have a clearer picture of how things might have occurred. Marianne Hirsch states that by accessing the "Nazi gaze", spectators assimilate the thought, strategy and purpose of the eye behind the lens, thus looking "at the image as the implicit Nazi viewers did, under the sign of the exclamation point" (2003: 24–25).

Susana Radstone argues that shortening the distance between victim and perpetrator is the key to understand the complexities of traumatic memory. She uses the word "witness" to refer to photograph viewers, explaining that a witness can be a "reader/listener/spectator or a construct internal to testimonial texts or discourses" (Radstone 2001: 62). She acknowledges that this process is necessary for history "not to repeat itself [stating that] the task of witnessing and remembering the sufferings of others ought not to be separated from the difficult acknowledgment of testimonial witnessing's darker side" (*ibid.* 61).

An emblematic case of approaching the testimonial "dark" side is visible in the trial case of former Nazi leader Adolf Eichmann (1906–1962). During the Third Reich, Eichmann oversaw the facilitation and logistics involved in the deportation of Jews to concentration camps. After the end of the war, US forces captured him. In 1950, he escaped prison and fled to Argentina where he lived incognito for ten years. In 1960, he was captured by Mossad and taken to Israel to face trial. This event was historical. Eichmann was a "symbol of Nazi genocide, synonym of evil [and] the demon-Nazi of whom Hitler, Goebbels, and Himmler had denied the world by committing suicide" (Torgovnick 2005: 63–64). Therefore, convicting Eichmann of crimes against humanity and sentencing him to death by hanging was seen as an exemplary act of justice for the crimes committed by the Nazi regime.

As has been broadly documented, during the trial, Eichmann denied his responsibility arguing that he only obeyed orders, being a "cog" in the whole Nazi apparatus. A witness of the trial, Hannah Arendt, argued that "Eichmann seemed incapable of taking a larger view of what he was doing – indeed it seemed that at many times he had no view of what he was doing except that he was doing his job and, in his own eyes, doing it well" (Clarke 1980: 420). As a former Jewish prisoner, Arendt was surprised that she didn't see the person she expected in the trial. Eichmann was not the so-called monster as he had been broadly described in the media. On the contrary, he looked like a man who had

"used his judgment, reasoned and willed" to execute his job (*ibid.* 421). This pushed Arendt to try to understand Eichmann's perpetrator's mind, expecting to find the origin of his evil. She concluded that Eichmann's evil was banal, meaning that he was "incapable of reason and thought and will and judgment, he could hardly be held to be morally culpable for his actions" (*ibid.* 425). For this, Arendt was strongly criticised, especially by Jewish people. Arendt responded that her statement did not absolve Eichmann of guilt and that her intentions were to comprehend better the different forms of evil that can be present in a perpetrator's mind.

As mentioned, when perpetrators' testimonies do not provide information that prompts memory and recognises offences, perpetrators' photographs might help reveal the missing pieces. They cannot speak for the offenders, yet they might portray a different understanding of reality from the offender's point of view. Therefore, perpetrators' photographs have indeed been useful in the prosecution of some Nazi officers. They have served to prove what the testimony either hid or denied. However, whereas this has been partially available for some victims of the Nazi Holocaust, the reality in other contexts of traumatic history, such as that of the Southern Cone, has been notoriously different because of the strategic secrecy in which torture/disappearances took place, as well as the deliberate destruction of incriminatory material.

In this regard, by the late 1970s, Eduardo Galeano described the experience of Uruguay, Chile, and Argentina in the following way:

> En Uruguay la tortura se aplica como sistema habitual de interrogatorio: cualquiera puede ser su víctima, y no sólo los sospechosos y los culpables de actos de oposición. De esta manera se difunde el pánico de la tortura entre todos los ciudadanos, como un gas paralizante que invade cada casa y se mete en el alma de cada ciudadano. En Chile, la cacería dejó un saldo de miles de muertos, pero en Argentina no se fusila: se secuestra. Las víctimas desaparecen. Los invisibles ejércitos de la noche realizan la tarea. No hay cadáveres, no hay responsables. Así la matanza –siempre oficiosa, nunca oficial– se realiza con mayor impunidad, y así se irradia con mayor potencia la angustia colectiva (Galeano 2004: 360–361).

In the following section we will concentrate on the case of Chile. We will analyse the problematic conflict of memory and reconciliation in this country, aiming to demonstrate that the inaccessibility of perpetrators' testimonies and photographs has been an obstacle for victims to create coherent narratives of tragic past occurrences.

The Chilean dictatorship: Absent testimony

After the dictatorship, two commissions for reconciliation were organised in Chile. The first one (the Rettig Commission) was led by former president Patricio Aylwin (1918–2006), the second (the Valech Commission) by former president Ricardo Lagos (b. 1938). The Rettig commission sought to clarify the existence of human rights violations committed during the dictatorship. This was an "extraordinary achievement, impressive not only for its impeccable documentation but also for its broader historical and institutional analysis of the period" (Wilde 1999: 483). However, a problem with it was its limitation "to the investigation of cases exclusively involving disappearance and death" (Pino-Ojeda 2015: 11). According to Jorge Mera, this commission failed to signal legal responsibility, which was Aylwin's way "to avoid a confrontation with the Armed Forces through the use of methods that attempted to heal civil-military relationships" (qtd. in Pino-Ojeda 2015: 6–7). This consensus sought to create a climate of peace and stability, so that the past would not interfere with Chile's economic development. As stated by Elizabeth Jelin, this was a common characteristic in the post-dictatorship processes of the Southern Cone where "los relatos de las dictaduras [pusieron] énfasis sobre los logros pacificadores o sobre el progreso económico" (2002: 42).

A glimpse of change was expected with the advent of the Valech Commission, formally known as the National Commission on Political Prisoners and Torture. This included the declarations of the victims of torture and persecution, as it also clarified that they were a common institutional practice during Pinochet's administration. "The report also established that such practices were developed not only in clandestine centres of the DINA (Dirección Nacional de Inteligencia, National Intelligence Agency), but were also carried out in many military bases" (Pino-Ojeda 2015: 6–7).

Because of its focus on establishing military responsibility for the torture, death, and disappearance of citizens during the dictatorship, several military officers faced trial and were condemned for crimes against humanity. For instance, Manuel Contreras (1929–2015) – the leader of the DINA – was sentenced to 529 years in prison. This sentence was exemplary as it symbolised the end of military impunity in Chile. Several other military leaders were also condemned, except for the top authority of the genocide: Augusto Pinochet (1915–2006).

Not only did Pinochet not face trial, but he also maintained his military and political status after his rule. When democracy resumed, he continued to be Commander-in-Chief of the Chilean Army, and once retired he used his right as a former President of the Republic to become a Senator for Life. This position gave him immunity within Chile.

Yet, in 1998, Pinochet was arrested in London under an international warrant issued by Spanish law. Spain claimed that crimes against humanity were international, and that Pinochet should face trial in that country. This episode was unexpected, and it surprised the Chilean population. He spent 503 days of house arrest waiting for the British law to decide on his extradition. That event made "vulnerable a figure who [bore] a heavy symbolic freight from a generation at the centre of national life, reviled or celebrated by different parts of the population, borne with a certain fatalism by perhaps the majority" (Wilde 1999: 474). The process was long, and it mobilised both supporters and detractors of the UK. Finally, his extradition to Spain was denied. The British court determined that the dictator was not medically fit to face an international trial, thus returning to Chile in 2000.

As with Eichmann, Pinochet did not admit his responsibility for the atrocities that occurred under his rule, nor did he ask for forgiveness. For example, when queried about the killings included in the Rettig Commission – while he was Commander-in Chief of the Chilean Army –, he stated that those actions responded to a patriotic commitment (in Rodríguez, Díaz, and Vedoya 2018). When asked about the bodies found in Patio 29, he declared that they were the result of an irregular war that had been thoroughly planned by the Soviet KGB (in "Augusto José Ramón Pinochet Ugarte y El Patio 29" 2011). In his last interview in 2003, when consulted about his asking for forgiveness, he replied that he did not see a reason for that. He argued that he had "saved" Chile from becoming another Cuba, and that he was the one in a position to forgive others (in "Entrevista a Pinochet" 2003). In this statement he clearly referred to his failed assassination by the FPMR (Frente Patriótico Manuel Rodríguez) – the armed branch of the Communist party – in 1986. These types of answer were common. Pinochet avoided referring to the violation of human rights in public and when confronted on a specific question, he tactically changed the topic or provided an unrelated and controversial answer. "En realidad, los dichos de Pinochet surgen como si estuviera improvisando una respuesta, trivializando lo que sabe, con un sentido común rígido, que silencia un posible trasfondo" (Varas & Carrasco 2020: 185). Because of this, there are no public incriminatory testimonies from the Chilean dictator.

Unlike the Nazi regime, where concentration camps were public knowledge, Chilean torture centres were kept from the public view and their existence was not made official until the return of democracy. Whereas the Nazi regime boasted about their power, by showcasing their control over prisoners in concentration camps, the Chilean military regime opted to deny their existence. Their strategy was based on a policy of destruction and disappearance. While some centres were physically destroyed after being used, prisoners were also disappeared in barbaric conditions (Santos 2016: 257).

Unlike the Nazi concentration camps, prisoners' photographs from the Chilean detention and torture centres are a rare find. Prisoners were not allowed to have cameras and the Chilean officers did not engage in photography. It was not part of their duties, and it did not align with their policy of destruction and disappearance. Some of the few photographs that are available today belong to the records of Dutch photographer Koen Wessing (1942–2011). After the 1973 coup, Wessing travelled to Santiago aiming to capture images from this relevant moment in Chilean political history. He took photographs of soldiers and prisoners' relatives in the streets of Santiago. Yet, somehow, he also managed to enter the National Stadium to take photographs of soldiers and prisoners. Soldiers appear holding guns, while prisoners appear waiting at the tribunals for their interrogation or, in some cases, their execution. These images are relevant because they portray people who were probably no longer seen by their families. Yet, they are not incriminatory because they do not portray acts of violence, neither are they helpful to clarify how and why people died or disappeared.

Other photographs from the dictatorship times – related to people's disappearance – were taken years later when prisoners' bodies began to be found, creating a gap between this moment and the day of their detention. Given this information was either hidden or manipulated by the mainstream press, independent photographers had a relevant role in spreading this material throughout alternative channels.

Using visual material that somehow provides the victims with some answers is what Walescka Pino-Ojeda calls "forensic memory": the search and "archaeological analysis of human remains in order to determine the type of physical violence that caused the individuals to die" (2013: 171). Pino-Ojeda states that this type of work "compel[s] viewers to delve into their own biographical-social ruins through the use of a testimonial voice – not an easy task in the Chilean context, where, for the most part, distancing and negation of atrocity have operated at various levels" (*ibid.* 172). Pino-Ojeda values the existence of this material as it helps to reconstruct the past. She posits that victims' relatives can picture their becoming by accessing forensic evidence, an indeed relevant task for the recovery of Chile's traumatic memory.

However, while forensic memory may provide information about the outcomes of detentions and tortures, it fails to clarify the reasons why they occurred, especially considering that detention was sometimes arbitrary. From this perspective, forensic memory may help to reveal the pieces, yet not to provide the answers that perpetrators have refused to give. While this process aims to understand how history evolved, it also becomes repetitive and insufficient to understand the whole picture. It transforms into a hegemonic type of memory that legitimises what and how to remember, thus relegating

the debate on political and legal responsibility. The reason why this happens is comprehensible. When the pain inflicted is recent and the wounds have not healed properly, remembering those who opened them becomes an uncomfortable and painful experience. However, as we have previously stated, the perpetrator's gaze is an aspect of memory that might provide answers that elaborated hypotheses have not. When they are unavailable – as is the case with Chile –, we posit that fictional narratives may contribute to the assembly of such missing pieces.

Fiction, Jacques Rancière argues, gives sense to real action in that it articulates the way we perceive, say, or think about things. Fiction,

> es un modo de enlace que utiliza modelos de racionalidad -y especialmente modelos de causalidad- para ligar un acontecimiento a otro y darle un sentido a este vínculo. En este sentido, la acción política y la ciencia social utilizan las ficciones tanto como los novelistas o los cineastas. Y en lugar de discutir las relaciones entre política y literatura, podría ser interesante analizar los paradigmas de presentación de hechos, de identificación de personajes y situaciones, de encadenamiento entre acontecimientos y construcciones de sentido, que circulan entre diversas esferas de la actividad humana (Rancière 2014: 25).

Fiction is not about debating what is real or unreal given that these elements are not opposed. Fiction helps to say "he ahí lo que está dado, la realidad que vemos y sentimos. He ahí las causas de esto dado, la manera en que estas cosas están vinculadas y producen un sentido de conjunto. He ahí la manera en la que pueden o deben cambiar, los futuros que este estado de cosas autoriza o prohíbe" (*ibid.* 36). That is exactly how fiction may become political. Fiction depicts the ways in which people make decisions about equality or inequality, "sobre lo que seres que pertenecen a una cierta condición pueden o no pueden sentir, decir y hacer" (*ibid.*). Fiction works as an example of human behaviour, showing us the ways in which we may face relevant decisions in life.

In the next section we will focus on how Lemebel's semifictional novel *Tengo miedo torero*[1] offers a unique portrayal of Pinochet, recreating both his gaze as a perpetrator as well as his non-existent testimony.

[1] Among Lemebel's literary production (mainly *crónicas*), this novel is his most recognised work internationally. Apparently, its writing style has made it more comprehensible and easier to translate. The novel has been translated into English (*My Tender Matador,* Grove Press 2003), French (*Je tremble, ô Matador,* Denoel 2004) and Italian (*Ho paura torero,* Marcos y Marcos 2011).

Unveiling the perpetrator's gaze in *Tengo miedo torero*

Tengo miedo torero was published in 2001, one year after Pinochet's return to Chile from London. It is set in 1986, on the verge of the dictatorship's end. The protagonist is a transvestite whose name is never mentioned, and whom Lemebel introduces as La loca del Frente.[2] She falls in love with Carlos, a Chilean *guerrillero* who is plotting an attack on Pinochet. Other relevant characters are Pinochet and his wife Lucía Hiriart. Throughout the novel, Lemebel recreates fictional dialogues between them in which he exposes Pinochet's weaknesses. Yet, most importantly, he enters the dictator's mind, recreating his childhood memories. We argue that this approach would contribute to reproducing the perpetrator's gaze, providing readers with an alternative version of the past, which – although fictional – might contribute to finding coherence in the absence of an official testimony in this country.[3]

Previous academic studies on the figure of Pinochet in *Tengo miedo torero* have mainly identified the construction of a homophobic and misogynistic character. Vek Lewis, for example, states that the dictator is "shown as paranoid and insecure". Pinochet hates homosexuals because he thinks they bring bad luck. The novel "makes apparent the paranoia of Pinochet and his obsessive hatred of anything 'feminine,' passionate, and nonlinear". This is evident, for instance, when "he demands the removal of someone he suspects to be a maricón cadet soldier from his property" (Lewis 2010: 214–215):

[2] La Loca is a character who inhabits several of Lemebel's *crónicas*. In simple terms, we can define her as an effeminate man who wears women's clothes, cheap makeup and wigs, echoing the outfit of the Santiago de Chile's transvestites. In *Tengo miedo torero*, La Loca's identity is explored more broadly. The writer constructs a complex character with strenghts and flaws, who also develops a political voice in Chile's dictatorial scene.

[3] *Tengo miedo torero* has been broadly analysed by academia (Blanco 2001; López 2005; Smuga 2010; Lewis 2010; Areiza 2011; Da Silva 2012; Berensen 2014; Ward 2016; Buenfil 2016; Silva 2017; Furió 2018; Pérez 2019; Ruiz 2019). Some of these works have concentrated on the literary connections between this queer novel and other Latin American pieces of the same genre, such as Manuel Puig's *El beso de la mujer araña* (1976). For example, Juan Pablo Neyret states that both novels – Puig's and Lemebel's – introduce queer love from a political angle. In Puig's piece, Molina is a homosexual who shares a prison cell with Valentín, a *guerrillero*. They exchange points of view about homosexuality and politics respectively, ending up in a sexual intercourse. In Lemebel's novel, *La loca del Frente* shows Carlos her vision on homosexual love. In exchange, Carlos shares his political views on social justice, thus influencing her to have a more critical opinion about Chile's unbearable situation. Towards the end of both novels, Molina and *La loca del Frente* end up having a different opinion about the dictatorship. Driven by love, they are finally convinced that armed resistance is the way out of Argentina's and Chile's totalitarianism (Neyret 2010: 7).

> ¿Y de dónde salió este pájaro afeminado?, preguntó al secretario apuntando al cadete que se alejaba hasta el bosque acompañado por el escolta […] No sabe usted que estos tipos traen mala suerte, y quizás qué tragedia nos espera este fin de semana. ¿En qué cabeza les cabe permitir que un maricón use el uniforme de cadete? ¿No sabe usted que estos desviados son iguales que los comunistas?, una verdadera plaga, donde hay uno… ligerito convence a otro y así, en poco tiempo, el Ejército va a parecer casa de putas. ¿Y qué hacemos con él, mi General? ¡Sáquenlo inmediatamente de aquí y lo da de baja! (Lemebel 2001: 149).

On the other hand, Pinochet's misogyny is depicted when speaking, or thinking, about his wife. Lucía is shown as a woman who constantly scolds him for his incompetence and lack of leadership. She is manipulative, controlling, selfish, superficial, and egocentric. He does not tolerate her presence, yet he is unable to contradict her. Lemebel recreates dialogues between the two, revealing their decadence and frivolity, and ridicules them, especially when they use their privilege and power to obtain personal benefits. The author uses satire as a literary technique to expose this couple's illegal enrichment, showing that they are unable to tell the difference between the nation's budget and their own (Buenfil 2016: 116–17):

> ¿Cómo se me ve este Chapó Nina Ricci? […] Y no pongas esa cara de amarrete pensando que costó un dineral, apenas quinientos dólares, una ganga, una baratura comparado con la fortuna que tú gastas en los fierros mohosos de tu colección de armas […] Imagínate pagar treinta mil dólares por un cachureo así. Además, ni siquiera tenías la seguridad de que era auténtica. Y si no fuera porque yo te di el pellizcón en el brazo, si no fuera porque yo me di cuenta que esos falsificadores tenían un canasto de pistolas bajo del mesón, tú caes redondo como gringo tonto con esos españoles ladrones (Lemebel 2001: 69–70).

It is relevant to mention that by the time *Tengo miedo torero* was published, Pinochet was being prosecuted for the violation of human rights related to the Caravana de la Muerte case.[4] By that time, the dictator's health had weakened. He spent time in a military hospital and was diagnosed with dementia. Therefore, the legal charges were dismissed, demonstrating the impossibility of prosecuting him in Chile. Once more, Pinochet emerged victorious, avoiding

[4] Caravana de la muerte was an Army squad organised by Pinochet and led by Brigadier General Sergio Arellano Stark (1921–2016). After the 1973 coup, this crew travelled throughout Chile by helicopter aiming to find communist leaders. They captured and killed at least 72 people, whose bodies were thrown into mass graves. For more information see https://www.t13.cl/noticia/nacional/caravana-muerte-operativo-lidero-arellano-stark-y-dejo-al-menos-72-victimas (viewed 29 April 2022).

justice, and remaining silent. This strategy was echoed in the circles of power that protected him. The press, meanwhile, contrasted this news with the victims' relatives' frustration, showing their discomfort and pain, yet hardly questioning the legal procedure. In this scenario, the novel appeared as a narrative element that defied impunity. It gave citizens the possibility to remember whom Pinochet had actually been, to speak up, to end Chile's conspiracy of silence (Blanco 2001: para. 29).

Lemebel's main contribution with *Tengo miedo torero* is to break that silence. We have previously mentioned that incriminatory testimonies of Pinochet are non-existent, as are photographs that might reveal how and why people disappeared in Chile. Then, with this novel, Lemebel offers an alternative version of events that aims to fill these gaps. By employing fiction supported by historical events, the author enters the dictator's mind, recreating his motivations, insecurities, and fears, disclosing his gaze as a perpetrator. As we will see later, he also reveals that his evilness might have originated in his childhood. Yet most importantly, he recreates dialogues where Pinochet acknowledges his intention to kill, thus producing an incriminatory version of the testimony that the former dictator refused to give in life.

Lemebel portrays Pinochet as an aging character who often falls asleep when resting. Frequently, he dreams about his own death. In one scene, he foresees his funeral, picturing his dead body being drawn by a horse carriage along empty city streets. He sees soldiers stationed on corners to bid him farewell with their guns, while grey lilies fall from the sky. All is perfect, just as he imagines it. Suddenly, he realises he is alone at his funeral. He tries to wake up, but he cannot. He knows it is a dream, yet he is unable to escape it. He walks the concrete streets aiming to find an exit. The concrete begins to melt while bodies, bones and bleeding hands start to appear. They pull him down to the ground. They represent disappeared bodies that have come to claim justice:

> Andar y andar por el cemento reblandecido de la ciudad, hundiéndose hasta la rodilla en un mar de alquitrán, de cuerpos, huesos y manos descarnadas que lo tironeaban desde el fondo hasta sumergirlo en la espesa melcocha. Ese barro ensangrentado le taponeaba las narices, lo engullía en una sopa espesa avinagrándole la boca, asfixiándolo en la inhalación sorda del pavor y la violenta taquicardia que le mordía el pecho, que lo hizo bramar con desespero el aullido de su abrupto despertar, sudado entero, temblando como una hoja, con los ojos abiertos a la cara de su mujer que lo remecía diciéndole: ¿Qué te pasa, hombre? Otra vez te quedaste dormido con las manos cruzadas en el pecho (*ibid*. 73).

In this scene, the writer depicts Pinochet as a person who is betrayed by his subconscious. Although he does not accept his involvement in people's

disappearance, his mind speaks for him. The writer imagines how the dictator's mind works. He recreates his thoughts, dreams, and mental dialogues, thus offering a subconscious testimony that arguably aims to replace the absent one.

Lemebel's novel continually seeks to create a coherent narrative about Chilean traumatic memory. This is also visible in his attempt to unveil the origin of Pinochet's evil, an action that somehow echoes Hannah Arendt's approach to Adolf Eichmann's testimony. The writer accomplishes this by travelling to the dictator's childhood, identifying his tenth birthday as a crucial moment in his life. On this occasion, his mother organises a party with all his school classmates. He invites everyone, although they do not show interest in attending.

The party was the opportunity for Augusto to take revenge on his classmates. Because he indeed expected them to come, he arranged dead flies and cockroaches in his birthday cake, hoping the guests would eat them. In the narration, Lemebel not only emphasises Augusto's organisation, wittiness, and planning, but also his psychotic obsession with dissecting insects, an image that indirectly alludes to the tortured bodies thrown in mass graves during the military period:

> Augustito no cabía de gusto, imaginando sus bocas engullendo la torta, preguntando qué sabor tan raro, qué gusto tan raro, ¿son pasas?, ¿son nueces?, ¿son confites molidos? No, tontos, son moscas y cucarachas, les diría con una risa macabra. Todo tipo de insectos que los había despedazado, echándolos a escondidas a la bella torta. Entonces vendría la estampida, las arcadas, escupos y vómitos que arruinarían el mantel (*ibid.* 113–114).

This scene concludes when, finally, none of his guests arrive. Therefore, he ends up celebrating alone with his mother and the maid. Because they were diabetic, they could not eat the cake, so they force Augusto to gobble a whole piece:

> Y cuando sopló y sopló y sopló, la porfía de las llamas se negaban a extinguirse, como si trataran de contradecir la oscura premonición. Bueno, y como no hay mal que por bien no venga, cantó su mamá, mi niño podrá comerse toda la torta que quiera, porque a nosotras con la nana nos mataría la diabetes. Y ante los desorbitados ojos de Augustito, el gran cuchillo de cocina rebanó el bizcocho en un gran trozo que le impusieron frente a su cara. Y no me digas que no quieres, lo amenazó la madre, dulcificando su gesto al ofrecerle en la boca una cucharada del insectario manjar. Ya pues, mi niño, abra la boca. A ver, una cucharada por mí, una cucharada por la nana, y una cucharada por cada año que cumple. Y Augustito, conteniendo la náusea, tragó y tragó sintiendo en su garganta el raspaje espinudo de las patas de arañas, moscas y cucarachas que aliñaban la tersura lúcuma del pastel (*ibid.* 115).

In the excerpt above there are symbols that connect Pinochet's childhood with his adulthood. For example, the writer uses the expression "oscura premonición" to refer to the failed birthday party. However, such an obscure premonition may possibly allude to Augusto's future. Another relevant symbol is the knife. It is presented as a big kitchen blade, used to slice a sponge cake. This grotesque image may possibly be linked to the use of knives as a torture instrument in Chilean detention centres. Similarly, the consumption of insects is possibly connected to the introduction of insects and rats into women's mouths, vaginas and anuses, a brutal method of torture described in the "Informe de la Comisión Nacional sobre Prisión Política y Tortura (Informe Valech)" (2005: 243), which Lemebel subverts as an act of justice against the offender.

It could be argued that revealing this information from a child's perspective might help to absolving the perpetrator of guilt, understanding that it possibly appeals to the audience's sympathy and compassion. However, we claim that this approach works exactly the opposite way. Accessing the thoughts of the perpetrator as a child is the writer's strategy to connect the past with the present. Following Torgovnick (2005), we could state that Lemebel exposes Pinochet's childhood, aiming to elicit an empathic connection. The aim of this would be to make the reader reflect upon his/her own childhood memories. Thus, he/she would be prompted to understand that a traumatic past – regardless of the reasons – is not an excuse for aberrant decisions as adults. From this perspective, understanding the perpetrator's mind would help the reader comprehend the origin of terror, thus becoming what Susana Radstone (2001) calls a "witness" of traumatic memory.

As we can see, Lemebel's depiction of Pinochet emphasises aspects of his personality that allow readers to connect with this character. The articulation of humour, satire and irony would elicit a discussion about politics and memory with the audience in a more familiar way, opening the door to access this complex topic with less severity, an indeed original approach recognising that the figure of Pinochet would normally inspire adverse feelings.

Following Héctor Domínguez (2004), we could categorise Lemebel's strategy as melodramatic. Melodrama is defined as "la narrativa de la exageración y la paradoja, de la pasión y la emoción, aquella que revuelve ética y estética, aquella que 'la historia del pudor y la racionalidad del triunfo de la burguesía nos acostumbró a descartar como populachera y de mal gusto'" (Martín-Barbero 1987: 258–259). In Lemebel's literature, Domínguez identifies that melodrama "impone una parodia del modelo hegemónico que problematiza su imposición al vaciarlo de su contenido de control social y reforzamiento de las conductas 'correctas' y llevarlo a un desbordamiento donde el drama del bien y el mal a ultranza se repolitiza" (2004: 132). Thus, by presenting a character with flaws

and weaknesses, in a melodramatic context, Lemebel smudges Pinochet's authoritative image, an action that functions as an instrument of insurrection.

By the 1990s, a similar strategy was visible in Chilean *telenovelas*. While in the dictatorship these shows avoided political, social and controversial topics – in order to project an idea of stability –, in democracy, they presented "una serie de vicios e imperfecciones humanas, lo que los [hacía] mucho más cercanos al público y por lo mismo más queribles e identificables" (Sepúlveda 2003: Section 3.4). Hence, characters with political roles began gradually to be introduced, highlighting their flaws, yet in a humorous way. For example, *Estúpido Cupido* (1995) and *Sucupira* (1996) introduced laughable characters with political responsibilities who robbed, lied, planned murders, spied and cheated on people.[5] Esteban Alvarado states that in those years, *telenovelas* approached political topics with satire and humour because Chilean society was not prepared to discuss politics more seriously in this television format (2019: 106–107). People were coming out of a traumatic recent political past, so these themes had to be presented carefully and gradually.[6]

As anticipated above, another aspect that proves the uniqueness of Lemebel's novel in approaching the perpetrator's gaze is the way the author deals with Pinochet's testimony. The writer exposes the dictator as a hateful and vengeful character, committed to finding communists. Once again, animals are symbolically used in these dialogues. For example, Pinochet calls them dogs and cockroaches: "Perros vende patria, que se salvaron jabonados el '73, debería haberlos aplastado como cucarachas a todos y santo remedio" (*ibid.* 152). By including this phrase, the writer connects the dictator's childhood memories – as previously mentioned – with an action he desires to accomplish in the present, creating a coherent narrative across time. Most importantly, this

[5] In *Estúpido Cupido* (Sabatini [dir.], 1995) "el alcalde interpretado por Luis Alarcón encarna las ideas conservadoras y lucha contra el liberalismo no sólo de sus adversarios políticos, sino que con la rebeldía de su hija, Isabel Margarita, ambientada en plena efervescencia de los años sesenta" (Alvarado 2019: 47). In *Sucupira* (Sabatini [dir.], 1996), "[l]a historia parte con la contienda electoral por la alcaldía del pueblo. Por ella compite Federico Valdivieso (Héctor Noguera), un hombre ladino, mujeriego y tozudo, que con aires de demagogia y grandilocuencia al hablar, promete entregarle al pueblo un cementerio, pues los difuntos deben ser enterrados en otras tierras al no contar la localidad con uno propio" (Alvarado 2019: 80).

[6] According to Valerio Fuenzalida, this was also because *telenovelas* were broadcast in the evening, once the family was back at home, after finishing their daily activities. At that time, people wanted to release tension, expecting a relaxing moment by watching fictional stories that could resemble theirs, yet without their problems (Fuenzalida 1992: 5).

statement camouflages a testimony. Pinochet's desire to smash them refers to something he regrets he did not do before. By stating that they were luckily saved, he subconsciously expresses that others were not as fortunate. Not only would this demonstrate his factual knowledge about torture, but also his responsibility and evil intention to kill.

Another decisive statement, which also serves as testimony, is uttered hours before the failed attack by the FPMR. Pinochet is waiting in his country house in El Cajón del Maipo to be escorted to his Santiago residence. He is unsure about coming back to the city because he has heard on the radio about protests: "que las protestas, que las marchas de los estudiantes, que los bombazos y apagones de este once que al parecer, por lo que transmitía esa Radio Cooperativa, se venía con toda la batahola revolucionaria para desestabilizar al gobierno" (*ibid.* 158). After hearing this, Pinochet declares he is not afraid of them because they are all communist cowards. He affirms that if they were to attempt a revolution, he would stand firm and react fearlessly: "Pondría mano dura, y si era necesario, decretaría toque de queda y las tropas del Ejército se harían cargo de la situación. No vacilaría en dar la orden de fusilar a cualquier comunista que intentara desafiarlo" (*ibid.*). Once again, the writer simulates entering the dictator's mind and attempts to read his thoughts. They reveal his intention to command another coup, and give the order to kill, an incriminatory statement that would prove his direct responsibility for Chile's genocide.

In sum, in this article we have started by stating that analysing memory from the perpetrator's perspective could reveal a clearer and more complete version of traumatic history. Whereas this has been possible for some victims of World War II, it has been unavailable for others, such as the relatives of the detained-disappeared in Chile. Because Pinochet's regime tactically executed a policy of destruction and disappearance, incriminatory material that reveals the perpetrator's gaze is almost non-existent. Therefore, memory in Chile has mainly focused on remembering the dead, rather than understanding criminal motivations. Having clarified this, we have concluded that fictional narratives may become relevant in reconstructing blurred versions of the past, thus helping to conceal the missing pieces, fill the gaps, and break the conspiracy of silence. In this respect, Lemebel's portrayal of Pinochet as a perpetrator in *Tengo miedo torero* is a relevant contribution. By recreating the dialogues of Pinochet – in which he acknowledges his intention to kill – the author unveils a camouflaged version of the testimony that the dictator refused to give in real life, thus providing readers with a more logical and complete, albeit alternative/fictional, version of how and why past events unfolded.

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