

Marginality and Resistance in Pedro Lemebel's *Loco afán. Crónicas de sidario*

Marginalidad y Resistencia en Loco afán. Crónicas de sidario de Pedro Lemebel

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to explore the writing strategies Pedro Lemebel uses in his text to create a space of representation of the silenced and marginalized voices of homosexuality as an alterity of Western culture. Lemebel emphasizes its roots in reality, the corporeal and the peripheral space of daily practices in areas not legitimized, to build a discourse of rebellion and resistance. The narrative technique presents an infringing discourse that creates a counter-culture, reinforced with the artifice of travesty, impersonation and theatricality with a special sensibility and love of the unnatural suggestive of the aesthetics of Camp. The use of exaggeration and emphasis contribute to a celebratory and parodic gesture of the stereotypes models taken from the media, cinema, religion and social institutions proposed as cultural elements.

Key words: marginality, parody, resistance, theatricality, otherness.

Resumen

Pedro Lemebel plantea una posición frente al mundo y una preocupación por crear un espacio de representación de las voces silenciadas y marginadas de la homosexualidad como alteridad de la cultura occidental. Lemebel acentúa su arraigo en la realidad, lo corpóreo y el espacio periférico de las prácticas cotidianas de las zonas no legitimadas para construir un discurso de rebeldía y resistencia. Las estrategias de escritura sugieren un discurso infractor que crea una contra cultura, acentuada por el recurso de lo ostentoso, extravagante y teatral presente en el travestismo que marca una afiliación al movimiento Camp. El exceso expresivo sugiere un gesto paródico y celebratorio de los estereotipos propuestos por los elementos culturales tomados de los medios, el cine, la religión y las instituciones sociales.

Palabras claves: marginalidad, parodia, resistencia, teatralidad, otredad.

"To be natural is such a very difficult pose to keep up"

An Ideal Husband. Oscar Wilde

"The plague came to us as a new form of colonization by contagion. It replaced our feathers for syringes, and the sun for the frozen drop of the moon in the place of Aids"

Crónicas de sidario. Pedro Lemebel

a denunciation of injustice, a rejection of classism and wild homophobia.

Lemebel presents a historical account of the struggle of the homosexual community in Santiago, Chile. The author seems to show his concern about the marginality of this minority to create a space of representation of this silenced voices of homosexuality and transvestism considered as "the other" in Western culture. Marginality is the condition constructed by the posited relation to a privileged centre, as Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin¹ (2010) define. There is a triumph in the dismantling of the centre of the official culture in Lemebel's chronicles since he brings to the foreground figures from the underworld who are victims of persecution, disease, misery, plague and prostitution that velvet, lace and glitter cannot conceal. Thus, the author plays emphasis on the reality, the corporeal and the peripheral space of the daily practices of these characters to construct a discourse of rebellion and resistance.

The title of the text, as in other books of the author, refers to the verse of a popular song, in this case a tango "Ese mismo, mismo loco afán". The book is divided into five chapters that in total include thirty-one chronicles, several of which have subtitles. Each section is set in the context of Chile some years before the Military Coup in 1973.

As Susan Sontag² (2001) describes the cultural element of Camp is to dethrone the serious and to propose a comic vision of the world. In a glorification of characters, Lemebel seems to share a Camp vision of the world when he builds a picture of fictional characters with performative emphasis on exaggeration. The use of theatricality and the transsexual identification with Hollywood film stars construct a discourse of rebellion and resistance in a peripheral space of the city of Santiago.

¹ Ashcroft, B., Gareth G. & Tiffin, H., *The Empire Writes Back*, Routledge, London, 2010

² Sontag, Susan, *Against Interpretation*, Vintage, Great Britain, 2001

Narrative Technique

The text offers a fragmented and heterogeneous material such as poems, letters, listing. Although the chronicle is presented as a story of episodes presented as real events, Lemebel plays with the limits of genres from the inclusion of a wide range of possibilities. This is what the writer calls "entregéneros".

The first and second section include the chronicles about some figures of transvestism presented as "the gay zoo" that "seems to elope continuously from identity" (p.57) The third section "Ese mismo loco, loco afán" introduces the MANIFESTO of Difference in the form of a poem that fuses two aspects of discrimination in society, the political movement of the Left and homosexuality. The poetic self speaks of its difference with a violent tone and alludes to its sufferings for being different in order to highlight the masculine courage to accept his homosexuality and the premonition that homophobia will not end after the return of democracy.

Writing Procedures

The voice of the intradiegetic narrator, a direct witness of the unfortunate political events, tries to recover the facts from his memory in a state of collective spirit. Thus it marks a textual journey through different anecdotes and rituals of transvestism while delineating a local homosexual diversity ("las regias", "las regias", famous "," the poor locals "," the mediopelo "," the street "). All these names bear the mark of exclusion and disease characterized by the Latin American social, economic, political and cultural context.

"Y toda la resistencia cultural en la dictadura, políticos, artistas, teóricos del arte, fotógrafos y camarógrafos sapeando la performance de "Las Yeguas del Apocalipsis", que regaron de estrellas el paseo comercial del sexo travesti". (p.36)

The figure of the transvestite poses a questioning to the notion of fixed identity since it reflects a break in the unity of the categories of sex and gender. This fracture is manifested in the writing from cuts of phrases and words, juxtaposition of codes and synecdoche. For example: in the chronicle of "The Regime of aluminum the monkey", the Queen of the brothel, a sexual orgy becomes a field of corpses and is described as fragments of bodies distributed in the "sodomite blister";

namely:

“Un torso Moreno con el garabato de la loca derramada en su pecho”,

“Unos glúteos asomados por el drapeado de la sábana”,

“Cadáveres de boca pintada boca pintada enroscados a sus verdugos”. (p.30)

“Su demencial estado de reina moribunda que no quería estirar la pata, que se le ocurría cada cosa, cada excéntrico antojo.”. (p.43)

This fragmentation of the total body produces the effect of dehumanization to suggest incomplete and reified beings that “drip dirty tears” and parade through the mist of the city. The mocking tone in the description of death reinforces the grotesque deformation of the narrator’s point of view. “La Regine estaba tan pesada, se hinchó la pobrecita y tuvimos que soldar el cajón para que no goteara.” (p.31)

These writing procedures create a discourse of rebellion from the breaking of a universal order codified by laws and guidelines, while breaking a gender coherence to incorporate the discourse of difference. Lemebel plays with the connotations implicit in the titles that appear in the stories, such as: “Lo que el SIDA se llevó” a wordplay of the title of the film “Gone with the Wind”, and other references to American cinema “Los diamantes son eternos”, and popular songs “Aquellos ojos verdes” “Tu nombre me sabe a hierba”. It can also be thought that the cinema space reveals the need to escape from the harsh reality of marginal culture.

Moreover, the narrator offers a demystification of national heroes when he making reference to historical figures, “la versión homosexual de los próceres” such as “un Bolívar tetón y ligero de cascos mostrando las nalgas morenas de la utopía latinoamericana” “seguramente los padres putamadres de la patria tuvieron su noche de celebración, chimba y zamba.”” (p.135) Likewise, the stars of the Hollywood cinema like Madonna, Marilyn Monroe, Liz Taylor, emerge as iconic images betrayed and degraded by the ironic effect of idealization as they are transferred from the dominant culture to the periphery of the second degree. The introduction of mimicry and parody indicates an ambivalent strategy of subjection to and idealization of the dominant culture, but also a gesture that attempts to recover the native voice. Thus, Lemebel shows his concern with the

defense of the native ethnic groups in literary discourse.

“Ella sola se puso Madonna, antes tenía otro nombre.

Pero cuando la vio por la tele se enamoró de la gringa, casi se volvió loca imitándola, copiando sus gestos, su risa, su forma de moverse. La Madonna tenía cara de mapuche, era de Temuco...” (p.33)

The style departs from the syntactic conventions in terms of grammar, spelling and punctuation to distance itself from the universalist view of language and a culturally essentialist stance. For example: “uno es tan refea” “uno anda tan despistada” Writing strategies suggest an infringing discourse that creates a culture of resistance based on emphasis and the excess of metaphorical renaming in a parodic gesture that is at once debasing and celebratory. The local “locas” are covered with lace and glitter, silver clogs and black or platinum wig, dressed in red satin to finally cross “the portico entangled with the plague” and submerge in “slimy waters” taking out “one way passage in the sinister boat.” This proliferation of signifiers that connote the meaning of “DEATH” suggest a baroque operation as defined by Severo Sarduy (2011):

“El barroco; superabundancia, cornucopia rebosante, prodigalidad y derroche (...) es la abundancia de lo nombrante con relación a lo nombrado, a lo enumerable, al desbordamiento de las palabras sobre las cosas”.³

Lemebel also shows Camp taste for exaggeration when describing la disco gay and the elements of visual décor with a large element of artifice.

“allí la maricada descende la amplia escalera de medio lado, como diosas de un Olimpo Mapuche” (p.51)

“los frisos etruscos en dorado y negro, las columnas helénicas y ese tufo a felpa mojada que pega fuerte, cuando se cruza la puerta donde un hombrón controla el ingreso” (p.51)

The written language has also echoes of colloquial orality. “El único pelao flaco que la Regine apadrinó como su amante oficial después de pasarle lista a la tropa completa” (p.27) Death is named with references to famous victims of the plague: glowing names in golden threads like Foucault, Hudson, Liberace, Nureyev (p.92) or with contrast and hyperbole as in the description of the agony of characters in

³ Sarduy, Severo, *El barroco y el neobarroco*, Ed. El cuenco de plata, Argentina, 2011

the chronicle "El último beso de Loba Lamar":

"Como una Azucena negra la piel de seda relampagueó en ese abismo. Como un cisne de oscuro nácar su cuello drapeado se dobló domo una cinta. Entonces, por la ventana entró un chiflón como témpano de tumba" "(P.45)

Emphasis and Fragmentation

Emphasis and fragmentation are also manifested in the phonic associations with the dissemination of meaning; in the "sodoma disco" they run "pisco soda, pisco sida, pisco las or loca pisco". The words become self-referential and show the artifice. For example, AIDS becomes a commodity with the language of advertising proclaiming prevention with the use of alliteration and enchanting rhythm "Ponteló-ponseló. Put on-put on-ponseló "(p.67)

The use of anaphora also reinforces Lemebel's the critical tone about the stars of rock music "Mucho gesto, mucha caricature, mucho desgaste del módulo andrógino en la super venta de su staff. Y al final, poco y nada de homosexual como discurso infractor en la música popular"... "p.99., Alliteration" lágrimas de maricocodrilo moribundo" (p.55) "and the union of opposites, poetic and prosaic image, are also recurrent resources in the text.

Travesty, impersonation and theatricality are mixed with lyricism and mockery to produce an alienation effect that forces the reader to re-read in search for new meanings to exorcise horror.

"Todas la vimos aletear con desespero para no ser tragada por la sombra. Todas sentimos ese hielo que nos dejó tías sin poder hacer nada. Sin poder dejar de mirar a la Lobita que quedó dura, con las fauces tan abiertas sin poder sacar el grito." (P.45)

Later, in the same episode, the ceremony and decoration of the dead body with "necrophilic craftsmanship" refers to a reaffirmation of the genre acquired through the copy or rather simulacrum of the models of the cinema's imaginary "... como la Marilyn Monroe... todas pudimos ver el maravilloso resultado de esa artesanía necrófila" (p.47)

It also creates the poetics of the gay nickname that hide the baptismal face and erases "the paternal tattoo that homosexuals only use for mockery and contempt". The name exists as a baroque allegory that masks, travesties, disguises, dramatizes or punishes the identity. (P.57) The

flaw is individualized, ridiculed and embellished. The list is infinite: La María Silicona, La Fácil de Amar, La Ven-Sida, La Frun-Sida, Depre-Sida, La Insecti-Sida, La Pata Negra. The orthographic alterations and the segmentation of lexical items are the resource that allows the author to emphasize the importance of the disease. Other nicknames function as feminine referents of the cinema: La María Félix, La Carmen Sevilla, La Carmen Miranda. The copy of these models is presented as a strategy of resistance, but at the same time they mark the abysmal distance with the original, since the beauty patterns consecrated by the canon do not correspond to the features of Latin American natives, such as "la diosa del Olimpo Mapuche", "la odalisca pehuenche". The critical voice that builds the discourse of transgression reaches the maximum point of expression with the "Manifiesto of Difference". The tone of anger emphasizes social injustice, hypocrisy, persecution and highlights the value of "manhood" to be accepted differently while criticizing the ideology of intolerance.

"Tengo cicatrices de risas en la espalda" "Mi hombría me la enseñó la noche" "Defiendo lo que soy" "Hablo por mi diferencia" "Mi hombría es aceptarme diferente" (p.87)

The author makes use of the metaphor of birds to refer to the characters who are victims of the plague "esas pájaras garzas de larguísimas piernas" p.78. Sometimes he abandons the tone of mockery and alludes to the suffering of their own homosexuality and that of future children who will be different "hay tantos niños que van a nacer con una alita rota y yo quiero que vuelen, compañero "(p.90). The poem ends with this expression of desire. The image of birds crosses the text with the sign of mockery, "su aleteo trashumante va a terminar en un charco" "gorriona marica" (p.78), but in the poem the voice pities and rescues the companions with the desire of freedom. This is reminiscent of the writer ⁴Juan Goytisolo (2007) who evokes the victims of Aids using the allegory of birds transmuted in search of their king in the novel *Las virtudes del pájaro solitario*: "estábamos condenados a desaparecer como pájaros de especie en extinción".

The chronicles mark a tour through certain areas of

⁴ Goytisolo, Juan, *Las virtudes del pájaro solitario*, Galaxia Gutenberg, S.L.; Edición: 2007

Santiago: the suburbs, San Camilo, the Alameda, etc. Michel de Certeau defines the neighborhood as “ese trozo de ciudad que atraviesa un límite que distingue el espacio privado del espacio público”, i.e. “un espacio urbano donde el usuario consigue crearse lugares de repliegue, itinerarios para su uso o su placer que son las marcas que ha sabido, por sí mismo, imponer”. This suggests a representation of space and a search for a space of representation. Hence a major feature of these chronicles is the displacement of individuals from the margins of the city of Santiago that in turn indicate the displacement of gender and identity in the figure of the transvestite, man became woman as “a carnation grafted with rose”. Lemebel works on the tensions between the centre and the periphery by building a new map of the city that exhibits what the official culture conceals.

Consequently, a new geography of the periphery, is incorporated into the space of the city to account for the multiplicity, plurality and otherness. The social displacement represented by the historical segregation suffered by the homosexuals that place them outside the bourgeoisie leads to a displacement of identity from the rupture between sex traits and gender traits in the process of rebuilding a new identity by imitation, especially of stellar figures of Hollywood cinema. This disharmony becomes more evident since under the mask of shine, sequins and feminine gestures lies a masculine body.

In addition, in a rebellious gesture, the author vindicates the figure of the transvestite of the Third World, renamed “la loca”, opposed to the gay model of the white race of the First World. The transvestite with his exuberant appearance poses an aesthetics of provocation to the dominant culture, as a Camp sensibility of the unnatural suggests, and then rises as a paradigmatic figure that, starting from a social and spatial wandering through the streets of the suburbs of Santiago and nocturnal suburbs of the city, and adopts a Carnival mask of bodies overexposed in an impulse of identity flight.

Conclusion

Lemebel builds a fragmented walk through Santiago, according to the political ups and downs of socialist illusion, dictatorship and democracy and a tour of areas of the city displaced from official culture. The landscape of the suburbs

of Santiago is painted, with dark gloom, misery of rags, cardboard and stubble of fruit. “The Palace of the Regine that is always in full function, illuminated in bright red by the neon of Aluminios El Mono is actually a tenement house that ““tambalea con los temblores, y las murallas rociadas de meado apechugan con el deterioro” (p.25) The writing puts into play the imitation and copy with false glitters that conceal the dirt, the detritus, the abject. All these resources refer to the “camp” aesthetic that José Amicola⁵ (2000) also defines as :

“una forma representativa teatral sobrecargada de gesticulación”, como “un cuestionamiento genérico”, como una sensibilidad particular gay que desde el lugar de la enunciación intenta una resistencia a la presión heterosexual compulsiva de la cultura dominante”

In this way, Lemebel highlights the disruption of the sex-gender system which, as a system of representation, assigns meaning, identity, and social hierarchy to individuals within society. Thus, those cultural elements that intervene in the construction of generic identities with models taken from the media, the cinema, the religion and social institutions, and the hegemonic controls of the dominant culture are deconstructed in an attempt to search for freedom and liberty for all those subjects who are subjected to rejection and exclusion.

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⁵ Amícola, José, *Camp y posvanguardia* Ediciones Paidós, Buenos Aires, 2000

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