

International Memory of the World Register

COLLECTIONS OF PRINTED CHILEAN POPULAR POETRY:

LIRA POPULAR

(Chile)

2012-58

1.0 Summary (max 200 words)

The *Lira Popular* collections represent both exceptional and unique documentary heritage of folk poetry. These rare collections provide a greater understanding of the mindset and ideas of the Chilean lower classes between 1880 and 1920. These documents, edited mainly by alliterated folk poets, raised topics of profound interest, mainly political and social, national and international, and were presented in a traditional poetic form (décima) and illustrated with singular woodcuts and engravings.

There are only three known collections of surviving sheets of *Lira Popular*, containing a total of 1567 unique pieces. Two of the collections are preserved at Biblioteca Nacional de Chile, and the third one is kept by Universidad de Chile. Both institutions have agreed that the nomination of this singular portion of documentary cultural heritage will encourage the protection, study, as well as dissemination of this essential and fragile expression of our continent.

In recent years there has been considerable interest in the research of *Lira Popular* as a phenomenon which can be addressed by many disciplines such as history, literature, art, anthropology, among others.

2.0 Nominator

2.1 Name of nominator (person or organization)

Biblioteca Nacional de Chile and Universidad de Chile.

2.2 Relationship to the nominated documentary heritage

Both institutions are custodians of the nominated collections.

2.3 Contact person(s) (to provide information on nomination)

1. Soledad Abarca, Jefa del Departamento de Literatura Oral y Tradiciones Populares of Biblioteca Nacional de Chile.
2. Alejandra Araya, Directora del Archivo Central Andrés Bello de la Universidad de Chile.

2.4 Contact details

Name	Address
1. Soledad Abarca	1. Alameda 651, Santiago, Chile
2. Alejandra Araya	2. Arturo Prat 23, Santiago, Chile

Telephone

1. (56-2)360 5228
2. (56-2)978 1070

Facsimile

Email

1. soledad.abarca@bndechile.cl
2. alaraya@u.uchile.cl

3.0 Identity and description of the documentary heritage

Lira Popular is the most important example of the genre of pamphlet literature published in Chile between approximately 1886 and 1930. It has been studied by various researchers from literature, music, fine arts, folk and cultural studies fields and its value has been recognized in the recent declaration by UNESCO Memory of the World Latin America and the Caribbean Committee (MOWLAC) (18 February 2011).

The *Lira Popular* collections proposed for the Memory of the World Register are preserved by two institutions, Biblioteca Nacional de Chile and Universidad de Chile. These collections named Rodolfo Lenz (1863-1938), Alamiro de Ávila (1918-1990) and Universidad de Chile contains a total of 1567 single and unique sheets of popular poetry published in Santiago, and in other cities of Chile, between approximately 1880 and 1940.

Each example of *Lira Popular* is a single page made out of common paper in variable sizes, from 18,1 x 19,2 cm to 78 x 55 cm, however most sheets are 38 x 52 cm average. Each sheet has a basic outline which includes common characteristics such as: popular engravings in the upper zone; a great title underneath and, in the lower two thirds of the format, between four and eight poetic compositions in tenths. Main topics were those related with social and political affairs in Chile and the World. The most outstanding ones referred to those about crimes, assaults and executions, religious and fantastic events. The sheets were illustrated mostly with woodcuts, clichés and engravings. The first ones were specially requested by the poets and they are very attention-grabbing because it's literal content, unpolished shapes, no details and iconographic simplicity.

Most sheets were signed by the authors; some of them used various pseudonyms. On occasion the address and the print company name can be on the individual sheets. This has allowed us to identify the most remarkable and productive popular poets: Bernardino Guajardo (1812- 1886), Nicasio García (1829-), Daniel Meneses (1855- 1909), Rolak, Adolfo Reyes (1870-), Javier Jerez, José Hipólito Casas Cordero (1851-), Juan Bautista Peralta (1875- 1933), among others, and Rosa Araneda (1850- 1895), probably the only woman who embraced a craft almost exclusively practiced by men².

Marketing strategy for this effort was very basic; it was performed in local squares or public markets and the target audience were labourers, cooks, farmers and the general lower or working class. This sales approach was similar to a Town Crier, but instead of announcing a public message it would be a means of selling the *Lira Popular*. This phenomenon had its peak during the turn of the century and as years went by 1900, the most important poets and tradition of printed popular poetry practically disappeared.

At that time, the *Lira Popular* was their most important information media, it could be acquainted with the current affairs and was similar to a current day newspaper.

3.2 Catalogue or registration details

Both Biblioteca Nacional's Rodolfo Lenz and Alamiro de Ávila collections are digitized and accessible through the new digital collections catalogue <http://goo.gl/38c8Q> (www.coleccionesdigitales.cl) while they can be studied at <http://goo.gl/qxkw6> (www.memoriachilena.cl) and <http://goo.gl/B2zll>

(<http://archivodeliteraturaoral.salasvirtuales.cl/>). These two collections are part of the Archivo de Literatura Oral y Tradiciones Populares of Biblioteca Nacional de Chile, which also hold the archives of Rodolfo Lenz who was one of the main collectors and contemporary researcher of the *Lira*.

Rodolfo Lenz collection call numbers are RL1-001 to RL9-0034, with a number of 327 items, whereas the 352 sheets of the Alamiro de Avila collection are identified by AA001 to AA352.

Universidad de Chile's collection of 888 sheets is also digitized can be searched at Bello's catalogue at <http://catalogo.uchile.cl/> under *Lira Popular* and call numbers are LP001 to PL874. There is additional information in a specially prepared website <http://www.archivobello.uchile.cl/lira/>.

Prior to the digital era both institutions have preservation microfilm copies of all items. See detailed descriptions provided in appendices 1, 2 and 3 (Isad G description guides).

3.4 History/provenance

The German professor, Rodolfo Lenz, was the first to gather the *Lira Popular*. He arrived in Chile in 1890, and he had begun his collection prior to that date. He continued to collect them until the beginning of 1930's. Once he stopped collecting them on May 15th, 1993, he donated his collection to Biblioteca Nacional de Chile. The collection contains 327 sheets, organized by publication date; from the 1879 decade until 1940's, almost the whole period of the *Lira Popular*.

Alamiro de Ávila, was a lawyer and a great bibliophile having among his collections sheets of popular poetry, whose origin is unknown. De Ávila died in 1990. In 1993, when his wife died, the collection was sold to Washington Pereyra, a bookseller in Buenos Aires, Argentina, in October 1998 sold it to Biblioteca Nacional. The collection of 352 sheets, were bound in 8 album type volumes. On their spine had labels with cataloguing numbers and diverse numbers on the inner side and codes which can be seen in the sheets. Nearly all the sheets were laminated with fabric as second support enabling its preservation. This collection comprises published sheets from the decade of 1890's to 1910's.

Raúl Amunátegui (1907- 1967), was also a lawyer and collected 888 sheets, divided in three bound volumes, he sold them to the Universidad de Chile in 1970. It is the largest collection of *Lira Popular*. There are sheets of 88 poets, plus those anonymous; within them there are those most renowned ones such as Bernardino Guajardo, Daniel Meneses, Rosa Aranceda, Adolfo Reyes, Juan Bautista Peralta. Publication dates include sheets from the 1890's to the 1910's.

3.5 Bibliography

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Tapia, Carolina. "Datación de las Liras Populares de la Colección Lenz". CD-ROM. Santiago de Chile: Consejo de la Cultura y las Artes, Fondart, 2008.

Uribe Echevarría, Juan. Flor de canto a lo humano. Santiago de Chile: Editora Nacional Gabriela Mistral, 1974.

4.0 Legal information

4.1 Owner of the documentary heritage (name and contact details)

Biblioteca Nacional de Chile Alameda 651, Santiago, Chile

(56-2)3605228

(56-2)3605239

soledad.abarca@bndechile.cl

Universidad de Chile

Arturo Prat 23, Santiago, Chile

(56-2)978 1070

alaraya@u.udechile.cl

4.3 Legal status

Biblioteca Nacional de Chile was created in 1813 and nowadays is part of Dirección de Bibliotecas, Archivos y Museos, Dibam, a public body that relates to the State of Chile through the Ministry of Education, and has legal personality and own heritage. Created on 18 November 1929 by the D.F.L. 5.200, gathering various ancient and prestigious heritage institutions, including the Biblioteca Nacional de Chile. The *Lira Popular* collections are part of the holdings of the Archivo de Literatura Oral y Tradiciones Populares.

Universidad de Chile was created by Law, on November 1842 and started operating in September of the following year. Legal entity of Public Law self determined, is an Institution of the State High Level Education, a national and public statement, with legal status and own patrimony. The *Lira Popular* collection is part of Archivo Central Andrés Bello same as other bibliographic collections, documentaries, photographs and iconographic materials of the University.

4.4 Accessibility

As it was explained in 3.2, both collections are fully accessible to the researcher community on microfilm or digital format (on site and online).

Because of the collection's rarity and conservation conditions the originals' handling and display is restricted, just in very special cases, is possible to request a supervised view of the original sheets.

4.5 Copyright status

According to the Chilean legislation, all *Lira Popular* collections are under Public Domain.

5.0 Assessment against the selection criteria

5.1 Authenticity.

Both Biblioteca Nacional de Chile and Universidad de Chile hold only original prints.

5.2 World significance.

The pamphlet literature, printed on sheets of paper to then form booklets of different sizes, sold at rock-bottom prices, gets its name from the way they were commonly advertised: hanging from strings stretched between two trees, posts or walls. Their status as "loose sheets", is connected with the world of printed flyers, by definition ephemeral because of its materiality as forms of movement associated with orality (tenths, poetry, song) and reading practices: opening speech, song, declamation, harangue, paging. The large format that characterizes the *Lira* was subject to the provision of material, which shortage forced to maximize their utility not only for oral multiplication of its contents, but also for its possibly enhanced visibility distance for his engravings and drawings. The average size of *Lira Popular* sheets is 38 x 52 cm, although the sizes range varied from 18,1 x 19,2 cm to 55 x 78 cm. This format is another argument of its unique features because it is larger than the traditional Spanish-string pamphlets, which also had usually four to eight pages, format shared by the first gazettes and serials.

Lira Popular, is representative of the commonly called *cord literature* of medieval roots as oral literature in tenths, and a unique expression of the mass media in the transition from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

It is a legacy of human culture and contributes to the study and preservation of popular culture, which has just a few printed and material expressions, precisely because it is ephemeral, often anonymous and low-cost materiality was highly vulnerable to the passage of time and physical agents destroy the paper in which it is printed.

It contributes to the knowledge of Western popular culture, and it brings a *mestizo* Latin American popular glance to it, also by its originality as a modern mass media based on an early Middle Age tradition which combines print, with a mix of visual and poetic texts about all kinds of events: yellow and red chronicles, tragic events, blood, abnormal, fantastic, political conflicts of people's interest (see appendix).

5.3 Comparative criteria:

1 Time

The period between 1860 and 1930, is known as the great transformation of world capitalism since the industrial phase of global expansion is accompanied by great cultural changes or modernization, including the revolution of the mass media supported by the technical possibilities of large circulation, the production of prints and photographs, and low cost of paper.

Lira Popular is connected to the mass media phenomena, because as any other printed media is considered itself as a source of the period to study the transition fundamentals and new cultural subjects and actors such as the poets, printers, editors and the readers. It has been the subject of interesting studies in the field of social sciences, since the mid-1980, but particularly since the 90's of the twentieth century in which records journalistic documentaries.

2 Place

Lira Popular is a cultural object which contributes to understand the history of popular culture in the world, because documented traditions, ways of thinking and expressing ideas in the context of the turn of the century (nineteenth and twentieth).

Some of the events, provided in the form of tenths, allow finding the ways in which oral and literate cultures converged in this original expression, taking about social and political agendas, social discontent, wars and disasters, acts of violence, elections, national holidays, love and hate.

Among the important political events, is the Pacific War, or even the Nitrate War, international global conflict that first put in evidence the relationship between economic-exploitation of natural resources and conflicts about countries' borders. This conflict marks to this day; relations between Chile, Peru and Bolivia, compromising the economic interest of the great powers industries from the late nineteenth century from United States, England and Germany (see attached examples).

3 People

Their creators, so called popular poets, inherit their skill that goes back to the arrival of the Spanish conquerors, which brought a rich thematic tradition and the verse structure known as the *spinel tenth*. Although it is an urban manifestation, most of these poets came from the rural areas of the country, where the popular poetry was kept and enriched. These poets, in the city worked as labourers or craftsmen, devoting themselves to the poetry composition in their spare time. Their capacity to write by heart is praiseworthy and as trustees of a tradition transmitted orally throughout generations.

Popular poets commented news and events in verse form. The main topics were told to those related with social and political affairs in Chile and the World; among them the outstanding ones referred to crimes, robberies and executions. They also devoted many compositions to fantastic events (myths and legends), religious topics and funny themes.

4 Subject and theme

These collections represent an exceptional documentary asset, as they are one of the few existing documents which show the feelings and thoughts of the lower classes of Chilean population, since the mid-nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth century, regarding topics of national interest, mostly politic and social ones.

While Spain's cultural heritage is reflected in traditional Latin American literature, and that some features of the phenomenon of *Lira Popular* of Chile can be found in other countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, we can conclude that *Lira Popular* is very unique and singular in comparison with other popular Latin American literary forms, because it is printed popular poetry, it used the tenth spinel structure and was produced by popular poets, many of them illiterate, who represented all the vast range of emotions and feelings the people on the historical facts which they experienced.

Micaela Navarrete, who in recent years has dedicated herself to the study of the *Lira Popular*, declares that “it should not be forgotten that the popular poets of the last century came from the rural areas as a majority, and these traditions were kept and passed orally to urban areas, from parents to sons, using the intact structure of tenths metric that arrived from Spain”³, commonly known as *Spinel Tenth*⁴ (décima espinela) which is the metric form highly used by the poets in their sheets. There are also other types of compositions, such as cuecas, tonadas, brindis, contrapuntos, romances (Chilean traditional songs), among others.

Subjects are divided generally in two: *a lo divino* and *a lo humano*. In these, “the authors of the sheets make comments on national events from the point of view of the people. They represented it accurately, as they themselves are a part of this people [...] They brought a new voice that is very rich in native metaphoric expressions taken from the deepest treasures of the rural and civic language,⁵” words of Juan Uribe Echevarría, writer and researcher of the Chilean popular poetry.

5 Form and style

Chilean *Lira Popular* as a printed poetry expression is unique; nonetheless there are many other examples of Cord Literature in Europe (especially Portugal and Spain) and other countries in Latin America, such as Brazil, Perú and Bolivia. The difference is mostly about the design of the single sheet, the distribution of the titles, illustration and poems as well as the time were these sheets were published.

³ NAVARRETE A., Micaela; “Algo de nuestra historia en la poesía popular”; en DIBAM (Chile). Departamento de Extensión; Liras Populares. Algo de nuestra historia en la poesía popular; Santiago: Dirección de Biblioteca, Archivos y Museos: Departamento de Extensión Cultural de la Biblioteca Nacional, Banco del Estado de Chile, 1992. 56 p. p. 5

⁴ Named after Vicente Espinel (1550-1624), the well known Spanish poet and musician.

⁵ URIBE ECHEVARRÍA, Juan; *Flor de canto a lo humano*; Santiago: Gabriela Mistral, 1974. 120 p. p. 16

Brazil has a long tradition and the woodcut artists are well known, their images are considered as folk art and they were exhibited in Chile in 2003 side by side with the Chilean *Lira* in an Art Festival dedicated to folk woodcuts.⁶

6 Social/ spiritual/ community significance

Lira Popular was not always valued for its aesthetic quality governed by the prevailing canon of the literature generated in the nineteenth century. These criteria built a concept of popular images associated with the infantile and rustic disqualified popular productions considered as lacking in the creative act and even characterized as the "bad taste".

In recent decades, from different fields of study and reflection it has been "rediscovered" the pamphlet literature as a cultural complex that requires other views, especially those who understand it as "publishing and cultural phenomenon" and debates about the definition of "popular". Our proposal is that the conjunction of an editorial decision to reproduce text and designs with "popular taste" (or "made popular") and the creation of popular artists, created a symbolic world nourished by their own biographies and imagination.

6.0 Contextual information

6.1 Rarity

These collection are the only known *Lira Popular* examples which survived over time, they were made out of low quality papers and circulated on popular areas of the cities such as markets and train stations, they were not meant to be preserved, people read them and passed to other people, some of them learned the poems and then put them on the garbage as people usually do with newspapers.

It was Rodolfo Lenz, a German Linguist and Philologist who arrived in Chile in 1890's who got intrigued by Chilean way of speaking and pronouncing, and started collecting the first sheets, with the purpose of studying the folk poetry in tenths. The other two collectors also were interested on folk studies as well as rare documents.

6.2 Integrity

The three collections are still in their original state since they were purchased or donated by previous owners. There is no record of missing sheets in either institution.

All 1567 pieces have been restored and preserved according with international standards and they have conserved their previous marks and elements in order to keep their original historic value, provenance and use signs for future researchers.

⁶ This exhibition was curated by Emilio Ellena, a connoisseur and collector of Brazilian printed pamphlets and engravings. A new reprint was made of Rodolfo Lenz book about *Lira Popular*, including engravings illustrations and a facsimile

