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The Relation of Film, Literature, and Music: *The Big Lebowski*'s Soundtrack as a Means of Significance Beyond the Anglophone World

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Abstract
Considering films as semiotically "multitrack" texts that integrate elements from different arts —writings—, this chapter analyzes the relationship between *The Big Lebowski* (1998), Carter Burwell's soundtrack selection for the film, composed mainly of preexisting songs, and Raymond Chandler's novel *The Big Sleep* (1939). In such a varied soundtrack, featuring well-known names like Bob Dylan, Elvis Costello, and Creedence Clearwater Revival, we can discern the meaning behind the Gipsy Kings' cover of "Hotel California." The reason is that, like a cover song, the double cultural background of the music styles —rock and Spanish rumba —could connect the Coen brothers' parodic film with other cinematographic genres, such as the Spanish quinqui films, contributing to the film's memory and significance beyond the Anglophone world.
Keywords: Raymond Chandler; Lebowski; Coen brothers; Quinqui; Gipsy Kings

The Relation of Film, Literature, and Music: *The Big Lebowski*'s Soundtrack as a Means of Significance Beyond the Anglophone World[1]

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Introduction

The Coen Brothers are renowned for their distinctive and provocative cinematic style, which seamlessly blends originality and artifice. Their films often feature characters in surreal and absurd situations, blurring the lines between realism and surrealism and leaving the narrative open to interpretation. The Coen Brothers are masters of cinematic elements, balancing violence, humor, and dialogue with a nuanced touch. Their work seamlessly blends classical Hollywood with hard-boiled narrative techniques, combining vulgar and kitsch elements with classicism across film, literature, and music.

Following the critical and popular triumph of *Fargo* (1996)[1], which earned them an Academy Award for Best Writing, the Coen brothers released *The Big Lebowski* (1998)[2], a film written earlier. The narrative revolves around The Dude's quest, spurred by mistaken identity and kidnapping, through the carnivalesque society of Los Angeles during the Iraq War in 1991. Amid corrupt millionaires, gangster pornographers, performance artists, and a Latino sex

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offender, The Dude's appeal lies in his systematic avoidance of problems. Bowling, narcotics, and White Russians constitute his raison d'être. With his bowling buddies, Walter and Donny, he finds himself stuck in the late 1960s and early 1970s, a period that marked the end of the hippie movement and the Vietnam War. Their detachment from reality and low social status render them vulnerable to ridicule.

Although *The Big Lebowski* was initially a box office flop in the United States, with many film critics criticising the plot's inconsistency, it has connected with audiences and become a fan favourite. Its popularity has grown to the point where it has inspired Lebowski festivals and a parodic, tongue-in-cheek movement known as “Dudeism.” In addition, the film has been analysed from various perspectives and has earned a reputation as “perhaps the most popular cult film of the early twenty-first century” (Jaeckle, 2014, p. 9).

One question perplexing scholars and critics is the reason behind the steadily increasing popularity of a film initially regarded as a cinematic failure (Martin & Renegar, 2007). A possible answer lies in the film's closed yet connotation-rich world. In the final scene of *The Big Lebowski*, the protagonist declares, “The Dude abides,” setting the stage for the Stranger's monologue about the perpetual human comedy across generations. This Shakespearean reference connects to Bakhtin’s carnivalesque theory and the design of extraordinary characters.

In *The Big Lebowski*, ambition, paranoid vigilance, the circularity of violence, and a sense of emptiness coexist with lively dialogues, representing the personal voices of passionate fools (Adams, 2015).

Within cinema's semiotic textuality, the film's human comedy thrives on an intricate network of cross-references from various sources—a "postmodern notion of using references as substance" (Tyree & Walters, 2020, p. 17). The critical texts in the film include Chandler's novel *The Big Sleep*, reimagined in the Coens' cinematic language (Adams, 2015), and a soundtrack predominantly composed of carefully selected preexisting songs (Pecknold, 2009). This article explores how the Coens crafted a human comedy through the intertextual dialogue between literature, film, and music. Focusing on the soundtrack's function, particularly "Hotel California," we aim to demonstrate that audiences did not merely watch a movie; they read it as a layered text. Additionally, we examine how the iconic Quintana bowling scene, which resonates with Spanish audiences, establishes connections with film genres such as the Spanish *cine quinqui*.

For the analysis, we adopt the concept of intertextuality, emphasising the techniques of rewriting and quotation. This perspective suggests that a text (a film or a song) is created and received in relation to other text systems, codes, and traditions within social and cultural

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contexts. No text is isolated; instead, it emerges from a dense intertextual landscape. Building on Kristeva's ideas, applied to novels, films, or songs, we recognize that each "literary word" opens vertically and horizontally, forming a debate between the author's intentions and the reader's active interpretation (Kristeva, 1980).

Regarding the film's reception and the social and cultural contexts, our focus on Spanish audiences invokes Hans-Georg Gadamer's phenomenology from *Truth and Method* (1998). Gadamer argues that readers – where reading is more than just reading a book – possess a consciousness shaped by history and culture. Interpreting a text involves a "fusion of horizons," which entails articulating a story within its cultural, historical, temporal, and spatial contexts (Gadamer, 2013). The reception of a particular film involves reinterpreting its original literary text and songs, integrating them into the specific cultural-historical horizon. Musical and visual elements become part of the paratextual conditioning (cultural background) that mediates between readers and their readings.

Rewriting Raymond Chandler

It is not easy to find any article, chapter, review, or book that does not mention the connection between The Big Lebowski and Raymond Chandler's books, particularly his most famous novel, *The Big Sleep* (1939). Furthermore, the Coen brothers constantly refer to the novelist. For example, in a 1998 interview with Doug Stone, Joel addresses the influence as

follows: “We wanted to do a kind of story—how it moves episodically, and deals with the characters trying to unravel a mystery, as well as having a hopelessly complex plot that’s ultimately unimportant” (as cited by Allen, 2006, p. 88).

However, there are different scholarly approaches concerning the natural grade of the intersection between book and film. On the one hand, some consider “*The Big Lebowski* an intentionally absurd and flamboyantly unfaithful adaptation of *The Big Sleep*” (Snee & Richardson, 2013, p. 51); on the other, those who believe it a film noir parody rewriting of Chandler’s pulp fiction based on connotations: imitation, homage, or critique, and pastiche assembled from quotations from widely disparate cultural sources (Adams, 2015).

Rewriting would be more accurate than adaptation. To settle the point, we would like to quote film director John Ford, who said: “I don’t like to do books or plays. I prefer to take a short story and expand it, rather than a novel and try to condense it” (Richards, 2020, p. 15). The medium of cinema relies significantly on audiovisual elements, and adapting short stories into films is a convenient approach. The brevity of the short story allows for greater flexibility in terms of plot, character development, and setting. Consequently, the director has more creative freedom in crafting the script, enabling them to make changes and discard elements as needed.

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The Coen brothers' *The Big Lebowski* offers a Chandlerian intertextuality that operates more as a satiric pastiche than as a fidelity-based adaptation. The brothers adeptly utilised critical elements from the original text to create a deliberate and polemical similarity between the two. As a sample, we will analyse the beginning of *The Big Sleep* in comparison to the film, which deviates from the book's temporal structure. Chandler's novels are famous for recreating Los Angeles's decay and corrupted soul, exemplified in the two opening chapters. In the first one, Marlowe arrives at the Sternwood mansion, symbolizing the city's luxury. Nevertheless, before entering, he describes himself:

> I was wearing my powder-blue suit, with dark blue shirt, tie and display handkerchief, black brogues, black wool socks with dark blue clocks on them. I was neat, clean, shaved, and sober, and I didn't care who knew it. I was everything the well-dressed private detective ought to be. I was calling on four million dollars (Chandler, 2018, p. 8).

Alternatively, in *The Big Lebowski,* there is a prologue in which the Stranger's voice-over monologue presents The Dude and Los Angeles:

> This Lebowski, he called himself the Dude. Now Dude, that's a name no one would self-apply where I come from. But then, there was a lot about the Dude that didn't make a whole lot of sense to me. And a lot about where he lived, likewise.
> … They call Los Angeles the City of Angels. I didn't find it to be that exactly, but I'll allow it as there are some nice folks there… (Coen & Coen, 2009, n.p).

The voice-over is a usual film noir narrative technique to introduce the story. *The Big Lebowski* is accompanied by the classic Hollywood western song "Tumblin' Tumbleweed" by The Pioneers. It stresses the Stranger's cowboy identity, although the lyrics comment on the

Dude and his lifestyle. The first time we encounter the Dude, he is buying milk for his White Russians: "Like the tumbleweed (and the bowling balls that occupy so much of his time), he rolls through life, carefree and blowing with the wind," which becomes clear just before The Dude enters his house and the mistaken identity triggers the narrative:

> Here, in the range I belong
> Drifting along with the tumblin' tumbleweeds
> After the setting, two other important aspects are the characters and their language.

Inside the mansion, while waiting to be received, Marlowe encounters Carmen Sternwood, triggering the first of many remarkable dialogues:

> She came over near me and smiled, revealing little sharp predatory teeth, as white as fresh orange pith and as shiny as porcelain. They glistened between her thin too taut lips. Her face lacked color and didn't look too healthy.
> "Tall, aren't you?" she said
> "I didn't mean to be" (Chandler, 2018, p. 8).

The most crucial part is Carmen's gesture:

> She put a thumb up and bit it. It was a curiously shaped thumb, thin and narrow like an extra finger, with no curve in the first joint. She bit it and sucked it slowly, turning it around in her mouth like a baby with a comforter.
> "You're awfully tall," she said. Then she giggled with secret merriment. Then she turned her body slowly and lithely, without lifting her feet. Her hands dropped limp at her sides. She tilted herself towards me on her toes. She fell straight back into my arms (Chandler, 2002, p. 18).

This specific scene is a subject of the Coens' rewriting. Just after the infructuous first meeting with the real Lebowski, The Dude picks up a large carpet, and on the way out, accompanied by Bradt, he meets Bunny Lebowski. She is sunbathing and painting her toenails.

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She extended her leg and repeatedly asked him to blow on her toes. At one point, The Dude says:

> DUDE
> You're Bunny?
> BUNNY
> I'll suck your cock for a thousand dollars (Coen & Coen, 2009, n.p).

During the scene, there is source music, a radio, and Alejandro Esquivel's song "Mucha Muchacha," underscoring her voracious sexuality. After Brandt's intervention, the scene is closed with a Marlowe statement:

> DUDE
> I'm just gonna find a cash machine (Coen & Coen, 2009, n.p).

In the novel's second chapter, Marlowe meets General Sternwood at a greenhouse surrounded by orchids: "They are nasty things. Their flesh is too much like the flesh of men. And their perfume has the rotten sweetness of a prostitute" (Chandler, 2018, p. 8). He is in his wheelchair on an old red Turkish rug "an old and obviously dying man watched us come with black eyes from which all fire had died long ago" (Chandler, 2002, p. 18). They discuss Shawn Reagan's disappearance and Carmen's blackmail.

The rewriting of this chapter into *The Big Lebowski* is the "great-room scene," a name that originated from the Howard Hawks' film version of *The Big Sleep* (1946) (Adams, 2015). During the second visit to Jeffrey Lebowski's mansion, a disabled, tearful millionaire, sitting

in his wheelchair in front of the fire, informs the Dude of Bunny's kidnapping. The room is all dark, and as a source of music, Mozart's "Requiem in D Minor" underscores the social importance of the "real Lebowski" as a powerful and wealthy man:

> LEBOWSKI
> Is it … is it being prepared to do the right thing? Whatever the price? Isn't that what makes a man?
> DUDE
> That, and a pair of testicles.

The character signature soundtrack, video clip, cinematic syntax

As we have previously analysed, the Coen brothers rewrote Chandler's novel intensely into the film through the use of setting, episodic plot, dialogue, and music. These are unique elements concerning a character-driven film with a lack of narrative, which allows the audience to focus on the colourful and amusing characters and the humorous and visually appealing scenes, or "the subversive mockery of narrative, the method for inhabiting a genre to expose artificiality" (Tyree & Walters, 2020, p. 17).

The soundtrack of *The Big Lebowski* consists of two interconnected layers that need to be differentiated. Carter Burwell's score stands out due to its dual structure in contrast to T-Bone Burnett's compilation of pre-existing songs. Burwell creates tonal continuity for the film through short, atmospheric cues that emphasize irony and stagnation rather. In contrast, Burnett, credited as the "music archivist," curates an eclectic mix of songs from artists like Bob Dylan,

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Captain Beefheart, and the Gipsy Kings (Willman, 1998). These selections enhance the film's intertextuality by adding cultural depth. While Burwell shapes the mood from within the film, Burnett constructs meaning from external sources. Their collaboration exemplifies the Coen brothers' semiotic multitrack approach, in which composed and found sounds coexist to convey themes of irony, nostalgia, and parody.

Using preexisting popular songs as a soundtrack in films, such as *The Big Lebowski*, can effectively create emotional connections between the audience and the characters, places, historical moments, and moods depicted in the story. This is particularly effective when the selected music is widely recognized and can trigger social and personal narratives that extend beyond the film's frame. By leveraging the well-established meanings and emotions associated with a particular music genre, filmmakers can effectively tap into the audience's emotional responses, creating a more immersive experience.

When filmmakers incorporate preexisting music into their films, it can elicit a particular response from the audience based on their familiarity with the music used. This is particularly relevant to the Coen Brothers' style of creating a world that is both real and surreal, as they often employ music that is on the verge of being recognisable yet distinct. They may use obscure songs by well-known artists or have lesser-known artists cover famous songs. For instance, Bob

Dylan's "The Man in Me" is a relatively unknown track from his album *New Morning* (1970), and the Gipsy Kings perform a cover of "Hotel California" by The Eagles.

The intertextual process of quoting music in the film reflects that the film does not entirely absorb the song, nor does it ultimately drink the movie; they continue to exist independently. Therefore, music plays an explicitly intertextual role in filmmaking, reflecting technical, social, and cultural issues. Moreover, when quoted in the film, songs acquire diverse associations and extra-musical meanings. Therefore, it suggests that a "synthetic multiplicity of signifiers" allows the almost infinite amplification of artistic or musical references (Stam & Raengo, 2004).

Chandler's novel plot can be compared to Marlowe's "private eye" ability to provide psychological descriptions of spaces and characters. This is evident in *The Big Lebowski*, where songs are quoted to reveal human morals. These songs are independent texts that existed before being used in the film. "The decision to use popular music rather than a traditional score, according to Carter Burwell, the film's music director and a frequent Coen brothers collaborator, grew out of the desire to construct the Dude's sense of time and space through music" (Pecknold, 2009, p. 278). The protagonist of the story, The Dude, appears to be out of touch with the current times. This is primarily due to his musical preferences, which mainly involve legendary artists of the past, such as Bob Dylan, Creedence Clearwater Revival,

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Santana, Elvis Costello, and Captain Beefheart. This creates a feeling of cultural dislocation in him. It is worth mentioning that he strongly dislikes the band The Eagles.

Nevertheless, this music selection avoids cliché. Ethan Coen clearly expressed this desire in an interview. They wanted "no lava lamps or that kind of shit. No Day-Glo posters on the wall of [the Dude's] house. No Grateful Dead music on the soundtrack" (Zlabinger, 2014, p. 97). This idea helps explain the Dude's dislike for the Eagles. In contrast, he shows a preference for the supposedly more "authentic" sound of Creedence Clearwater Revival. Within this discussion of authenticity, the Eagles are depicted as the commercialized outcome of the counterculture movement, representing something corporate and inauthentic. In contrast, Creedence is viewed as genuine and authentic.

The Big Lebowski exemplifies the distinctive style of the Coen brothers, characterised by its sharp wit and clever allusions to other works. They crafted a unique comedic atmosphere by adapting Chandler's writing and incorporating popular music into the film. The humor in the movie can be categorized into two main types: group identity comedy and dark humor—the Dude's relaxed and carefree demeanor results in visually stunning and entertaining scenarios. Additionally, the film incorporates several "musical moments" where songs and lyrics substitute for dialogue, offering insight into the characters and advancing the plot with cultural

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references. The Coens' cinematic techniques and pre-existing music bring surreal situations to life. The audience is presented with diverse perspectives through slow-motion shots and varying camera angles, heights, and levels. The film also utilizes vivid colors and lighting, frequently associated with pop or psychedelic aesthetics. These segments, reminiscent of music videos, are strategically placed throughout the film, adding to the narrative, strengthening its internal consistency, and generating multiple interpretations beyond what is presented on screen.

The memorable bowling Nemesis: Jesus Quintana

At the beginning of this article, we referred to the mild critical reaction concerning T*he Big Lebowski* in the Anglophone world, although its cult status gathered over time. It is exceptional, then, how the critical response was different in countries like Spain, where the opinions were unanimously positive and grounded on some ideas that developed with time, mainly concerning the characters; in *FilmAffinity,* we can read: "Splendid comedy with a whole array of wacky characters and surreal intrigues (...) Original and ironic story and quality cast. Terrific" (Morales, 1998, n.p). However, many of those reviews constantly reference a secondary character, Jesus Quintana, who only appears for a few minutes: "Delirious (...) A masterful moment: Turturro's appearance" (Garrido, 1998, p. 96). The Jesus Quintana bowling scene, quoting the Gipsy Kings' version of "Hotel California," is one of the most memorable moments in the film.

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The film operates on a dual system of reception and meaning development. On one level, the audience can appreciate the film as merely an amusing story; on another level, viewers (readers) with specific cultural literacy can enjoy the movie as a cross-reference game of allusions and intertextualities. In this way, music can also be appreciated and understood in narrative terms, for most audiences can still recognize the meaning of specific musical properties (such as rhythm and tone) in the scene's context. Without knowing anything about the Gipsy Kings, most audiences can recognize their flamenco style and connect it to Jesus's Latino identity and all the cultural stereotypes. However, for those who recall the Gipsy Kings' cover of the Eagles' song, there are added levels of meaning related to character (the Dude, who dislikes both the group and Jesus) and setting (suggesting stereotypical images of California in both the 1960s and 1990s) to explore (Ulmer, 2017, pp. 68–69).

In the previous scene, Bradt offers The Dude as a courier for Bunny's ransom money. So, while they look at each other, we have the first chords of a flamenco acoustic guitar. We are then returned to the bowling alley through that sound bridge as "the soundtrack, thus becoming another form of suture, stitching together divergences of story, plot, and meaning" (Conrich & Tincknell, 2006, p. 139). The introduction is a slow-motion close shot of Quintana's hands tying his laces and pulling up his purple socks in a ritualistic pose. Then, after several close-up shots of the bowling lane, we see the hand fan and Quintana's left hand loaded with rings and a long

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fingernail painted in lilac tones. All this happens as the instrumental part of the guitar continues, and it is then that we see Quintana getting ready in a general shot. He dresses in a tight purple synthetic multiplicity of signifiers, and a black net covers his hair. Then, in a close-up, we see him holding the ball close to his face and, perversely, as a carnivalesque satyr, sticking out his tongue to lick the ball before performing on the bowling lane.

Before throwing another detailed shot of the name, Jesus sewed on his chest. After throwing the ball in a long back shot, we see how he knocks down all the pins. Then he turns around to the camera and dances (the ritual), consisting of four steps back as his arms move vigorously from side to side, and finishes by lifting his right leg behind him and pointing at the camera. The filming continues in slow motion, but the song's tempo and percussion speed up, and the lyrics begin.

> Por el camino del desierto
> El viento me despeina
> Sube el aroma de colita
> Luna, luna de nadie

These first verses coincide with a reverse angle of Liam, Jesus's bowling partner, pointing back at the camera, so we see the whole dancing from his perspective. However, after that, Quintana starts to move toward Liam O'Brien, but he looks to his side and smiles as the camera turns to a medium plane. To whom is he grinning? After a change in perspective, we discover

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that other people are watching the scene. The camera does a close-up traveling movement of the incredulous faces of The Dude, Donny, and Walter, which coincides with the following:

> Allí estaba a la entrada
> Y las campanas a sonar
> Y me di con llamarme mismo
> Que es puerta del cielo
> Ella enciende una vela
> En muestra del camino
> Sueñan voces en el corredor
> Y lo que indican diciendo

Then, coinciding with the song's chorus (untranslated into Spanish), "Welcome to the Hotel California," Jesus lifts his arm with the plastic device into the air to signal triumph. The camera circles the arm and zooms toward The Dude, Walter, and Donny. They have been watching the performance, and there is a break in the sequence as it returns to dialogue.

The interpretation of the song's lyrics varies widely. One of the most persistent interpretations of the Eagles' "Hotel California" is that it contains satanic imagery or subliminal messages. This interpretation gained traction during the moral panics surrounding rock music in the 1970s and 1980s (Brackett, 2018). A closely related perspective views the song as a representation of the hedonism associated with Los Angeles, illustrating the collapse of the 1960s countercultural ideals into materialism and drug-fueled excess.

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However, academic criticism has largely dismissed these literal or moralistic readings. Scholars now interpret “Hotel California” as a reflexive allegory of American consumerism, transforming the "California Dream" into a claustrophobic nightmare. The song's imagery of luxurious confinement—symbolized by the hotel that one can "check out … but never leave"—is seen as a metaphor for late-capitalist entrapment. In this view, paradise becomes a spectacle, and freedom morphs into confinement (Brown, 2014). Rather than serving as a satanic parable, “Hotel California” is understood as a cultural critique of the seductions and imprisonments that come with abundance, offering a sonic commentary on post-utopian modernity in the American West.

Suppose it is read in relation to the already mentioned film’s authenticity discourse. In that case, the Eagles’ “Hotel California” invites satirical decoding, with a darker, closer interpretation that is more in line with the satanic popular understanding. In this register, the film’s clustering of ethnoreligious markers—Jesus (Latino), Liam (Irish)—together with Jesus’ sex-offence backstory and hypersexualised display, makes legible a negative commentary on Catholic institutional hypocrisy and desecration. Furthermore, note the Coens’ inside joke, when John Turturro again brushes against a California hotel (cf. *Barton Fink*). More broadly, the Coens’ hotel/hospitality spaces recur as theatrical sites of confinement—an established code

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already in *Barton Fink*—which amplifies the cue's work as aural signage of seduction turned enclosure.

However, the song and lyrics contribute to the subjective modelling of the scene or how spectators access or read the Jesus Character. The film's narrator must establish affinities with the viewer, who observes the protagonist from the outside, especially when his gaze intersects with the camera's focus through the so-called subjective shots. These added music and sound effects generate interest, or affinity, in the spectator toward the story of the character, a convicted pederast.

We agree that the different camera movements "and the slow-motion cinematography all evoke the style of older song and dance numbers" (Smith, 2013, p. 142). However, we would like to reemphasise the ritualistic aspect and its connection to memory. The music used in a movie scene is usually chosen to match its mood and atmosphere. So, utilizing music from a different context can be more exciting and risky. Employing it in a separate scene can give it a new meaning. In the Jesus scene, his flamboyant outfit and the music create a sense of detachment in the audience. The music is used ironically to comment on the character's actions and attitude in the scene. The contrast between the image and the song creates a powerful effect, which could be seen as an anachronism. The audience interprets the scene based on the

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contradictions between the music and the image on the screen. This creates a feeling of discordance between the setting, the bowling alley, Quintana's attire, and the song's theme of California, which has a distinct rumba flamenca rhythm. This contradiction is part of the field of irony and ambiguity, linking emotions to memory.

The choice of this song to introduce the character must have something to do with Jesús Quintana's Hispanic origin. The Gipsy Kings' version is ideally in tune with Quintana's kitsch aesthetics, "the flamenco underscores his ethnicity" (Adams, 2015, p.128), and "links the Hispanic ethnicity of the Dude's bowling Nemesis with the Dude's hatred of the Eagles" (Smith, 2013, p. 142). As we have already addressed the idea of rewriting Chandler through the film's text, the Coens also develop opposites: The Dude's life, an inarticulate Marlowe, revolves around music; he loves Creedence Clearwater Revival but hates the Eagles. Alternatively, there are traces too of Jesus in Chandler's writing:

> In his late novel *The Long Goodbye*, where a homosexual houseboy named Candy is the model for the paedophilic Jesus – threatens Marlowe with a knife, warning, 'Nobody fools with me' just as Jesus warns the Dude, 'Nobody fucks with the Jesus.' Another source for the Jesus might also be the 'boy killer' in Chandler's Big Sleep named Carol Lundgren, who, when questioned by Marlowe or anyone else, always shouts: 'Go **** yourself ' (Adams, 2015, pp. 126-127).

"Hotel California" is a version (a rewriting or intertextuality) of the song by the Eagles. Integrating itself into the film's text outside the Anglo-Saxon cultural context opens up another level of reading, such as evoking the "quinqui" genre. In short, it corroborates the need for a

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spectator who reads the film's text as the receiver of an art form composed of text, image, and sound. Looking is not the same as seeing; in this study, we should also consider adding sounds, such as the sung voice, to these images, which are received, processed, and interpreted by the receiver. In this study, the cover by The Gipsy Kings of The Eagles' hit "Hotel California" in the Jesus Quintana scene can allow our analysis of the idea of a double adaptation or intertextuality and Gadamer's fusion of horizons.

The musical styles highlight certain cultural aspects of the characters over others, creating specific associations between music, history, and culture. That is Jesus's case, a secondary character in music who is both a type and culturally mythologized. Nevertheless, perhaps this typification should be qualified, especially when remembering the immediate reception of the film by Spanish audiences and the "memorable" figure of Jesus, in particular. The musical style determines the reaction. The Gipsy Kings' version of "Hotel California" in the film is a rumba flamenco cover of one of the Eagles' best-known songs. This musical style can be associated with a particular social group, a culture, and a specific style of cinematography: the unique Spanish film style.

Rumba Flamenca is a deeply rooted lowlife popular style, characterized by "songs by popular gypsy groups whose lyrics spoke of police brutality and marginalization" (Whittaker,

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2020, p. 1), born from the crossbreeding of several previous genres. It would be, in short, the union between the so-called Caribbean rumba and flamenco and the Spanish *copla* or folklore. The *flamenco rumba* is a direct heir to the Cuban guaracha performed in Havana's theater at the end of the 19th century. Some flamenco singers traveled to Cuba and brought back rumba, which they adapted to their singing style and integrated into the flamenco repertoire. Simultaneously, it branches out into several forms, especially after the 1960s, in neighborhoods with a gypsy presence, such as Somorrostro in Barcelona and Puente de Vallecas in Madrid, giving rise to the names *rumba catalana* and *rumba vallecana,* respectively (Whittaker, 2020). In the 1970s, flamenco rumba transformed, creating a unique blend of musical and cultural elements that resulted in a dynamic and expressive genre. This crossbreeding of styles led the traditional forms of flamenco rumba to evolve by incorporating electrification and pop influences, resulting in a new and vibrant style known as Rumba Catalana, represented by artists such as Zíngaro, El Luis, and Los Chunguitos.

Spanish artists have successfully fused elements from African, Arabic, and American musical traditions, with jazz being an especially prominent influence. This fusion has allowed artists to remain true to their flamenco roots while attracting new audiences. The Gipsy Kings are a shining example of this fusion, having gained global recognition for their unique blend of

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styles. The flamenco rumba genre offers a powerful experience of cultural diversity and expression, characterized by its dynamic rhythms, emotive melodies, and passionate vocals. Through this genre, artists have been able to showcase the incredible richness of Spain's cultural heritage, making it an essential part of the country's musical landscape (Shahriari, 2017, pp. 113–115).

The *rumba flamenca* style serves as a soundtrack for *cine quinqui*, a term used to describe several films made in Spain from the late 1970s to the mid-1980s that focus on juvenile delinquency (Whittaker, 2020, p. 1). Some examples could be *Perros callejeros* (José Antonio de la Loma, 1977), *Deprisa, Deprisa* (Carlos Saura, 1981), or *El Pico* (Eloy de la Iglesia, 1983). Generally speaking, from a sociological viewpoint, they reflect the social reality of city suburbs during the Spanish transition to democracy and the growth of marginality and delinquency due to political uncertainty, youth unemployment, and the arrival of drugs. More specifically, this genre is rooted in romanticism, reflecting a cry for freedom and rebellion against established powers and their "repressive bodies" (police and *Guardia Civil*[3]). It also attempts to elevate the figure of the young delinquent (*quinqui*), a Rimbaudian Robin Hood, by placing them in the category of national heroes who fight against oppression.

We do not mean that the Coen brothers were directly influenced by *cine quinqui*, but some elements can contribute to *The Big Lebowski's* positive reception among Spanish audiences through connotations. Among these, there is an obvious connection with music, such as the Gipsy Kings' rumba catalana version of "Hotel California." This connection is also evident in the space in which Jesus performs his dancing, the way he dresses, and his aggressive language. Concerning the first aspect, in an interview, Ethan Coen defines a bowling alley as a place to hang out and talk nonsense: "People don't play all the time, they sit down with friends to smoke, drink beer, and socialize. We wanted to create an interesting visual background to describe the three protagonists" (Weinrichter, 1998, pp. 94–95). To understand its connection with *cine quinqui,* we must mention Eco's ideas of distinguishing between standard and intertextual frames:

> By standard frame, I meant data structures for representing stereotyped situations like dining at a restaurant or going to the railway station; that is, a sequence of actions which are more or less coded by our normal competence. Moreover, by intertextual frames, I meant stereotyped situations coming from the previous textual tradition and recorded by our encyclopedia, such as, for example, the duel between the sheriff and the bad guy or the narrative situation in which the Hero fights against the Villain and wins; as well as more macroscopic textual situations, such as the story of the viergesouilleeor the classical scene of the recognition (Eco, 1985, pp. 4–5).

The meeting point in *cine quinqui*, an intertextual frame, was the *salón recreativo* —a place to play billiards, table soccer, and arcade games— as a playful yet rogue symbol of a new form of leisure. Local delinquent heroes in these dark urban spaces, like Jesus, won all the

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tournaments and bets despite entering various fights and disputes with their rivals, such as The Dude, Walter, and Donny.

The final aspects we want to address are Jesus' attire, which is connected to Spanish culture, and his use of aggressive language. In the first case, costume designer Mary Zophres followed the script:

> Jesus Quintana was in a one-piece stretchy polyester jumpsuit with the name Jesus stitched on it. We made him totally matching, with his jumpsuit matching his jacket and his shoes and these sleazy see-through nylon socks (…) I Ifelt Quintana's jumpsuit should be really tight, because he is a pervert. Moreover, the way John is built would emphasize the little dance he does with his hips, and he needs to look really sleazy. It's almost like a '70s jumpsuit, except we didn't bell the pants (Robertson & Cooke, 1998, pp. 145–146).

The purple of Quintana's jumpsuit can emphasize, among Spanish audiences, the ritualistic aspect, as it is a color connected to bullfighting; he also makes a blow with his hip, typical of bullfighters, before facing the beast. If we go back to the first shot, he pulls up his stockings, and the bullfighter also goes through a long dressing ritual. The hair net can also be read as an allusion to the *montera* (matador's hat) and ponytail, typical of bullfighting attire. Finally, when he hits all the pins, he points his finger to the sky as a sign of victory, a gesture specific to a bullfighter who dedicates their triumph to their holy protectors.

Alternatively, *cine quinqui* clothing has a strong 1970s vibe, featuring bell-bottom jeans, tight t-shirts, and jackets. Similarly, Jesus wears significant gold jewelry, such as rings and necklaces. That contributes to his flamboyance and ostentatiousness, marking his parodic

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qualities. In contrast, *cine quinqui* characters wanted to get jewelry and other luxuries through robberies and delinquent activities. In most cases, after excesses and money were depleted, they were assaulted by a feeling of emptiness.

Finally, we would like to stress the importance of dialogue at the end of the Quintana sequence and its connection with music. As mentioned, the musical theme, which begins in the immediately preceding scene, where it is nondiegetic (sound lies outside that world and is inaudible to the characters—score music, authorial voice-over, or emphatic stingers—, is transformed at the end of the "videocliptic" sequence into an intradiegetic one, as its sound characteristics are modified and integrated into the scene as "ambient music" of the bowling alley; that is, it belongs to the story world and is potentially audible to the characters. Concerning the film language, the sequence's first part shows the synchrony of shots and musical rhythm. The irruption of dialogue marks the beginning of the second part of the sequence, a transition between the video clip and the film's continuity, without disrupting the narrative. Jesús Quintana reproaches his opponents in aggressive verbal fencing, in which he mixes Spanish words such as "Díos mío" and Mexican expressions like "pendejo," and concludes with the famous words: "Nobody fucks with the Jesus." Similarly, the *cine quinqui* language, slang developed in a lowlife and delinquent environment, is a mixture of Spanish and

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Gipsy slang used in the films to mark the character's profiles and peculiarity without making it a parody, which is the opposite of Quintana.

Conclusion

The evolution of films as intersemiotic devices has elevated language beyond any fixed mode of expression. The vast array of shared signs among humans vividly manifests in the intricate connections between various art forms, such as Chandler's novel *The Big Sleep*, and songs like "Hotel California." The Coen brothers' cinematic creation, *The Big Lebowski*, ingeniously draws inspiration from both sources. This broadening of meanings unfolds through the nuanced interplay of rewriting and intertextual references among novels, songs, and films.

In due course, these innovative contributions from the audiovisual realm seamlessly assimilate into the collective heritage or convergence of perspectives, thereby reshaping the reception and interpretation of artistic works. Consequently, the conventional spectator transforms into a reader-spectator, embodying a paradigm shift that fosters the expansion and generation of knowledge.

The Big Lebowski has become a cult movie because it can be analyzed through intertextualities with novels and songs. The Jesus bowling scene is an example of a part of the film that can be integrated into the realms of expectations and powerful memory, regardless of its relationship to the whole. Therefore, it is not a problem if the movie lacks a traditional

narrative, has an episodic structure, and is character-driven. Those elements contribute to continuously rereading disconnected sequences and images, assembling and disassembling, and remembering.

The Coen brothers' audiovisual interpretation of Chandler offers a unique perspective on the original novel. In a certain sense, they link a literary reality with its musical and visual reinterpretation. The success of *The Big Lebowski* has made it part of the heritage of those texts, always worth considering when new interpretations begin to develop. Thus, the product has become part of the shared heritage and fusion of horizons, modifying reception and interpretation.

The Big Lebowski presents many ideas that diverge from the director's initial intention. It is a human comedy, and life continues despite its glorious incoherence. Therefore, rereading perfect movies is impossible, as they exist only in our memory as a central idea or emotion.

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ENDNOTES:

[1]Fargo, directed by Ethan and Joel Cohen (Polygram Filmed Entertainment, Working Title Films, 1996), DVD.

[2]The Big Lebowski, directed by Ethan and Joel Cohen (Polygram Filmed Entertainment, Working Title Films, 1998), DVD.

[3]The Guardia Civil, Spain's oldest law enforcement body founded in 1844 during Isabel II's reign, was established to maintain public order in rural areas and along borders. Historically linked to central authority, it played a significant role during the Spanish Civil War and the Franco dictatorship. Today, it serves as a national police force with civil and military jurisdiction under the Ministries of the Interior and Defence.

[4] [Editor's Note] There have been recent articles on CINEJ as part of a previous call for papers of a special issue. This contribution and Britt (2025), Jones, Williams and Martin (2025), Althoff (2025) are among some of the best new analyses of this cult film classic.

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