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## Female Subjects in Late Modernity: Lucía Etxebarría's Amor, Curiosidad, Prozac y Dudas

### Keywords / Palabras clave

Women, Etxebarría, Female Subjectivity, Late Modernity

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Hispanic Journal of Theory and Criticism

## *Female Subjects in Late Modernity: Lucía Etxebarría's Amor, Curiosidad, Prozac y Dudas*

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At the time of publication of Lucía Etxebarría's Amor, curiosidad, prozac y dudas (1997), it may be said that Spain had already fully entered into what some term late modernity and others simply post-modernity, roughly equivalent to the prevailing culture in the developed capitalist world. For many Spaniards, 1992 symbolically represented the culmination of a process of renovation, stemming from the convergence of a series of events of international resonance occurring within the country: the celebration of the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the arrival of Spaniards to America, the designation of Madrid by the E.U. as the official European capital of culture, and the hosting of the Olympic Games and the World Fair by Barcelona and Seville respectively. These happenings aided in the recognition of Spain as a modern nation outside of its borders; at the same time, such recognition reinforced Spaniards' and their nation's own identification with the processes of modernity at the local level.

Among the writers most decisively dedicated to represent this late modern Spain, Lucía Etxebarria occupies a preponderant position, as a quick internet search will show. She has cultivated an image of herself as an outspoken, and often controversial, writer, knowledgeable of international popular culture and the ‘progressive international scene.’ She often broadcasts her opinions on women’s, gays’ and lesbians’, and more recently, environmental issues, as much in her books as in her web page and the media. Her first book, Aguanta esto (1996) is a biographical account of the relationship between Courtney Love and Kurt Cobain, her second novel, Beatriz y los cuerpos celestes (1998) contains lesbian eroticism, and all of her publications (fiction and non-fiction) place women at the center. In all cases, her aim is “to establish bridges between the academic world and popular culture; to create political and feminist consciousness and to promote activism through humor” (“intentar abrir los vasos comunicantes entre el mundo académico y la cultura popular; crear conciencia política y feminista y promover el activismo desde el humor”—<http://www.elmundo.es/encuentros/invitados/2004/04/10561>). However, although it is fair to say that Etxebarria in fact does bring a certain type of academic knowledge into popular culture, it is also true that she does not always succeed in presenting the progressive agenda that she claims to support.

In this essay, I use theories of sociologist Anthony Giddens (2001) and historian Nikolas Rose (1996) to demonstrate that Lucía Etxebarria’s easy adherence to some of the “expert systems” (Giddens) of late modernity counter her admitted aim to raise political consciousness and to promote activism. Amor, curiosidad, prozac y dudas tells the story of three sisters (the Gaena sisters) who come of age in a middle-class family in 1980s Madrid.

The novel's three main characters, Ana, Rosa, and Cristina, relate their life stories in the first person, thus creating themselves as subjects through their narrative acts. These three self-representations reveal the different discourses that the female subject must contend with in her search for self-understanding. Some of these discourses, such as the more traditional ones learned in Catholic school and in the home, are wholly predictable in a twentieth century Spanish novel about female development. Others, however, such as those characteristic of advanced capitalism and disseminated by global popular culture, are less predictable. In my analysis of *Amor, curiosidad, prozac y dudas*, I explore how within the context of late modernity the language and commonsense affirmations of expert systems such as "popular feminism" and "pop-psychology" have become what Foucault would call new technologies of the subject. I will examine how these two new technologies function in the novel in two distinct ways. On the one hand, they unmask traditional discourses by emphasizing their negative impact upon the development of the female self; and on the other, they mask the impact that other technologies, such as those of marketing and consumption, have on individual conduct and female subject formation.

Giddens's theory provides part of the frame for my analysis. He ascertains that one of late modernity main features is the establishment of a global "post-traditional order." This order, which transcends national boundaries, and develops from the integration of global developments within specific local contexts, is a consequence of the "globalizing tendencies of modernity." Such tendencies are inherent in the following "dynamic influences" (21) that pervade our historical present: 1) "the transformation of time and space", 2) "disembedding mechanisms", and 3) "institutional reflexivity" that extends to the subject. As Giddens states, our new conception of time and space, a result of "their separation and recombination in

ways that coordinate social activities without necessary reference to the particularities of place” (17), permits us to articulate social relations unthinkable in the past. Furthermore, the disembedding mechanisms, also referred to as “expert systems,” “bracket time and space through deploying modes of technical knowledge... They extend to social relations themselves and to the intimacies of the self. The doctor, the counselor and therapist are as central to the expert systems of modernity as the scientist, technician or engineer” (18). In other words, these mechanisms favor our disassociation with local particularities and our identification with abstract systems (from money to knowledge, whose authority derives from the experts that construct and validate it) that operate at a global level.

Nikolas Rose’s theory, on the other hand, illuminates how some of these abstract systems function in our historical present. Elaborating upon the ideas of Foucault, Rose proposes that the popularized discourse of the psychological disciplines has come to function as a technology, akin to others that Foucault deems technologies of the self. The technologies of the self constitute one of four types identified by Foucault (technologies of production, technologies of signs and systems, and technologies of power are the other three types). These technologies are based upon rationalizations (in turn the basis for various assemblages of knowledge, value systems, and physical spaces) that presuppose certain models and objectives for the human being. The technologies of the self, according to Foucault, “permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection or immortality” (18). In other words, these technologies affect our self-perception as well as the relationship that we establish with ourselves and with our world. They can be

disseminated by way of institutions (such as schools, jails, and hospitals), through confessional and self-questioning techniques (religion, therapy, relationship of the self with it-self), and they have as their primary objective to normalize (in the sense of regulate) value judgments and opinions that the individual uses in order to structure personal conduct. Most importantly, as Rose further elaborates, “they are always practiced under the actual or imagined authority of some system of truth and of some authoritative individual, whether these be theological and priestly, psychological and therapeutic or disciplinary and tutelary” (135).

The popularization of the discourse of the psychological disciplines provides human beings in late modernity with the language, knowledge, and necessary rationalizations that, according to Rose, turn them into instigators of practices through which the subject self-imposes discipline, a sense of duty, and docility; i.e. a technology of the self. I would like to propose that, like pop psychology, the language and rationalizations of liberal feminism often function in modern societies as a normalizing discourse, if not exactly as another technology of the self. I believe this type of feminist discourse to be normalizing in the sense that its language and affirmations, popularized and disseminated in the developed liberal democracies, have become a tool of liberal capitalist philosophy rather than the opposing ideology that it’s often purported to be. My reading of Amor, curiosidad, prozac y dudas intends to reveal the impact that ‘evident truths’ disseminated by both abstract systems have on women in the society of the 1990’s Madrid that the narrative fiction recreates.

A brand of feminism, roughly that of the first wave, that I call for lack of a better term, liberal feminism is fundamental in the narrative world of the novel. This type of feminist

discourse, born in the United States in the 1960s, that calls attention to the historical existence of female role models divergent from those proposed and defended by the western patriarchal tradition, frames the narrative of Amor, curiosidad, prozac y dudas. The novel opens with a quote from the Bible that refers to the use that Judith makes of her sexual power in order to liberate her people, and closes with the rejection of the myth of Eve and the resulting proclamation of Lilith as the universal mother; that is the woman created like Adam, from mud, unlike Eve who is given life through his rib. Throughout, there are all types of affirmations made by the three narrators (the Gaena sisters) that remind the reader of the persistence of ideologies and practices associated with the local culture that are pro-man, if not exactly misogynist. Some of these affirmations are: boys have it easy, schools educate girls to become women (not people), and boys control sex. There is even a character, Ana, whose problem appears to be “the problem that has no name” that Betty Friedan identified in Feminine Mystique. This normalized discourse of liberal feminism has, as I will show, lost the reactive power that it had when it originated; nowadays, it serves the purpose of ameliorating woman’s position within the status quo, rather than seeking to change or subvert the existing state of affairs. This discourse has, in the last forty years, been incorporated in and disseminated through particular types of literature, women’s magazines, movies, and television shows that circulate globally. It is the type that appears in the self-help books for professional women that Rosa (another one of the Gaena sisters) consumes, and whose authority she is incapable of questioning.

With respect to the psychology disciplines, there exists a reference to this field in the very title of the novel (prozac). However, most important is that the very development of the narrative fiction depends upon our understanding and acceptance of some of the basic



tenets of pop-psychology. The language and common sense affirmations characteristic of the “psy disciplines” (Rose) are an integral part of the personal narratives that the three main characters/narrators construct in their respective journeys towards self-knowledge and awareness. The language of autonomous subjectivity, authenticity, personal realization, and search for happiness, intrinsic to the pop-psychological discourse, has become so fundamental in late modernity as to turn into a type of knowledge whose authority is rarely questioned, and it is fundamental to the expression of the three protagonists. Prevalent in the modern society that the novel recreates, this discourse is disseminated within different spaces (the medical office, the workplace, marketing and publicity practices), and is filtered through a multitude of images that pose the dilemmas of the ‘self’ through every-day narratives: in talk shows on radio and television; in some sections of women’s magazines; in the global proliferation of 12-step programs; and in a seemingly general tendency to psychoanalyze as a means to understand ourselves and our environments. The novel questions, only to affirm at the end, the innocence of this tendency that Giddens sees as a consequence of the existence of “multiple choice as filtered through abstract systems” (5), and Rose understands as a new form of subjectification.

In the Spain of Amor, curiosidad, prozac y dudas, the ‘truths’ and the ‘languages’ disseminated by the two abstract systems, types of knowledge, previously delineated (liberal feminism and pop psychology), proliferate convivially with other declarations whose legitimacy is based on tradition and transmitted through the ‘language’ of the local culture. In other words, we are in a post-traditional order in which the ultimate authority of tradition is threatened by (and itself threatens) new ideologies defended and authorized by a variety of abstract systems. This continuous tension produced by the co-existence of different points

from which authority is exercised, each with their own ‘truths’ (at times complementary and at others, mutually exclusive), provides the context in which the Gaena sisters develop their subjectivities.

The trajectories of Ana, Rosa, and Cristina are so different that it makes sense to suspect that Etxebarria is in fact trying to offer an all-inclusive portrait of the situation of women in the Spain of the moment. Furthermore, it could be said that the author intends for her novel to serve as the vehicle for a feminist claim, given that she has marketed herself as one of the most outspoken voices of feminism in Spain. As I mentioned above, the narrative structure gives space for the voice of each one of the three sisters who relate their story in the first person. These three personal narratives, organized in chapters titled with words that line up the alphabet in its established order (“A de atípica”, “B de bajón”, “C de curro”, etc) reveal the distinct discourses with which the three women dialogue in their search for self-understanding. Among these, the most relevant are: 1) the discourse of tradition, propagated by the Catholic school and the values of their middle-class family, and 2) various discourses of late modernity disseminated by popular culture.

Ana, the oldest of the three sisters, initially adopts her identity as “a most prudent housewife” (“ama de casa formalísima”) through the teachings she receives both at the Catholic school and in the home. Later on in her life, however, she relies on women’s magazines in order to perfect the execution of this chosen role. These magazines, published by multinational companies, are full of practical advice on how to resolve the small dramas of daily cleaning and chores. They provide a type of language and knowledge that Ana incorporates into her personal narrative. For example, the chapter titled “H de hastío”—

which gives voice to Ana and her re-construction of the family history mediated by photographs, memories, and snippets of conversation—is interestingly peppered with expert prescriptions for excellent housekeeping, such as how to wash curtains and hang them so they do not wrinkle (96), how to varnish parquet (101-102), and the best quick fix for the homemade mayonnaise if the ingredients have separated (103).

Ana's cultural references (television programs, Barbara Cartland novels, 50s Hollywood movies, and magazines such as *Mía* and *Elle*) are indicative of the influence of particular abstract systems whose 'truths' are transmitted by the globalizing tendencies of modernity. At the same time, her continuous references to her Catholic school, where she learned the brand of morality espoused by National Catholicism, reflect the importance of the local tradition. This co-existence of the global and the local seems to have the effect of mutual ideological reinforcement, which favors the development of specific features in the subjectivity of this character. Ana's subject formation is marked as much by romance novels, the television, and women's magazines and their pseudo-feminist 'truths,' as it is by the teachings she received in Catholic school. Her daily routine is no different than that of the middle-class housewife of today and yesteryear. Likewise, her nervous breakdown should not be a surprise as it is illustrative of a concept that I mentioned above "the problem that has no name."

What is different is the type of discourse Ana utilizes in order to inquire about the motives of her crisis. In the first place, she admits that it has not been worth the trouble to adhere to the teachings of her mother and the nuns (225). This declaration, a by-product of her crisis (appropriately in accord with the tenets of pop-psychology that maintain that an emotional

crisis always produces learning), indicates her capacity to question the authority of local tradition. Such capacity does not extend, however, to an understanding of the effect that other abstract systems have on her subjectivity; she is incapable, for example, of appreciating the ideological impact of the teachings inculcated by magazines and television programs whose languages she utilizes as a means of self-affirmation. Furthermore, the process of introspection that Ana undergoes and that causes her to question the authority of local tradition is almost exclusively the result of the tools provided to her by the discourse of pop-psychology and the tenets of its experts.

Ana identifies two concrete episodes that she believes have resulted in her present state (pill popper, taking coffee with stimulants to wake up and alcohol with depressants to sleep): the abandonment of her father and the violation that she suffered at the hands of her first boyfriend (203). It is, in fact, the recent news that Antonio has just died in the exact same place where he raped her many years before that provokes her nervous breakdown, and leads her to divorce her husband and to try to discover the nature of her true dreams and personal aspirations. Ana rationalizes that her decision to marry “the best catch” (“el mejor partido”) and her almost obsessive attitude towards consumption are the result of a profound lack of self-esteem, provoked by the abandonment and subsequent rape (227). Her self-narrative never entertains other possible reasons for her crisis, thus she does not consider the possibility that her emotional necessities (romance, marriage, maternity) as well as material ones (high-end labels, designer clothing, luxury goods, and antiques) might have been stimulated by the abstract systems prevailing in the cultural and economic spaces that she inhabits. Similarly, she does not consider that her total economic dependence on her husband could have had as considerable an impact on her psyche as any childhood

experience. Even her final option for divorce seems to be more a consequence of the author's determination to present her character as a successful example of the unhappy housewife ready to embrace Friedan's recommendation to establish a "new plan of life," than the result of a newly gained self-awareness.

An analysis of the character of Rosa, a "high-ranking executive" ("ejecutiva de alto estanding"), allows us to investigate, from a different angle, the effects of the discourses of liberal feminism and pop-psychology on the formation of the female subject in the narrative world of Amor, curiosidad, prozac y dudas. The professional success of Rosa and even the very nature of her job are without a doubt determined by the global tendencies of the capitalist economic model and the effects of this model on local culture and social interactions at a local level. Rosa, like Ana, has opted for material goods and like Ana, reprimands her younger sister, Cristina for wasting her intelligence and preparation by working as a waitress in a chic bar. Not surprisingly, like Ana, Rosa finds an answer to her present state of unhappiness in the knowledge provided by the experts in pop-psychology. First she identifies her state of crisis, afterwards, she intends to understand the reasons for it. The abandonment of her father and an unrequited first love are the causes, according to her narrative, of her almost exclusive dedication to study and later to work. She relates that it is because of her father's leaving that she elects the strict order and stability provided by her total immersion in work over the chaos that she perceives as an essential ingredient of interpersonal relationships (76). Rosa carries this to the extreme by abandoning, right after her father's departure, the only activity that had ever given her any pleasure: the study of music (67). According to the rationalizations of Rosa, the origin of her unhappiness is psychological trauma. That, in spite of the fact that, as Cristina mentions but Rosa never

acknowledges, she has been diagnosed with a defect of serotonin, which is why she takes Prozac, and it could also very well be the cause of her present emotional state. And also despite the fact that the reading of the novel makes it patently clear that social success has been integral to Rosa's self-understanding since her childhood. It is her exclusive and almost obsessive dedication to study that provides her with the self-identity of super-intelligent-woman (almost a genius) that she takes pains to constantly validate in the presence of others (76-77).

This apparent necessity of social recognition results in her inability to question the professional exploitation to which she voluntarily subjects herself, working between 12 and 14 hours daily. Likewise, she draws on statements stereotypical of liberal feminism to justify her work schedule and to maintain self-denial with regards to her sexual identity. According to Rosa, her lack of rapport with men at a romantic level is due to the impact of local education and economic circumstances on the men of her generation. Both have contributed, in her opinion, to shape these men into "grown-up kids" who "cannot understand that I do not plan to dedicate my life to fixing up the home, nor caring for them, nor substituting for their mother" ("niños grandes que no pueden entender que yo no pienso dedicarme a arreglar la casa ni a cuidarlos ni a sustituir a su madre") (53). The irony of this statement becomes obvious when we discover at the end (and suspect throughout her narration) that she may simply not be interested in men at a sexual level. It is likewise ironic that Rosa's feminist awareness, which allows her to see the negative effects of the local culture in personal and professional interactions, disappears in the face of foreign reports whose authority derives from specific abstract systems that rule her conduct. Some examples are: "The Harvard-Yale report, published in 1987 by the sociologists Bennet and Bloom"

(61); “the manual Dress for Success, by John T. Molloy, published in 1977” (63); and the books of Debra Carter, a business consultant (“especialista en formación y asesoría de empresa”) (195). These books not only form part of her library, but they also construct her internal repertoire, as they are primary sources for practical advice that she follows to the letter without question. Many direct quotations from these manuals, present in her narrative discourse, reveal their function of reproducing dominant patriarchal structures in the world of the multinationals (63, 65, 195); however, Rosa fails to be conscious of this aspect.

These conflictive attitudes and reactions that we see in the personal narratives of Ana and Rosa seem to have an easy explanation according to Giddens’s theories. In accord with his notions, the multitude of abstract systems among which we live makes it almost impossible to achieve a profound knowledge of the inner workings of each of them. This would explain that, in the words of Giddens, “various attitudes of skepticism or antagonism towards abstract systems may coexist with taken-for-granted confidence in others” (23). In the case of Ana and Rosa, their questioning of local abstract systems (machismo and values held by the autochthonous tradition) is parallel to their unconditional acceptance of other abstract systems that have penetrated the national culture and are validated by their popularity in western liberal democracies (liberal feminism and pop-psychology). This explanation does not answer, however, a fundamental question: why these characters are so incapable of seeing the limitations imposed by precisely the abstract systems that operate at a global level, while at the same time, they are so capable of identifying the shortcomings of the local culture.

The development of the characters of Ana and Rosa suggests that for different types of women of a certain generation (those who grew up in the last ten to fifteen years of Franco's rule) it is difficult to see the existing continuities between many of the norms affecting the development of the female subject in the 1990's and those that were in place while they were growing up. Cristina, the youngest of the sisters (six and eight years younger than Rosa and Ana, respectively) overcomes, at least in appearance, this difficulty. She questions the rationalizations offered by the global abstract systems characteristic of late modernity as much as she questions local tradition. Cristina lives, from her childhood, immersed in a universe in which the global has integrated itself almost imperceptibly into the local culture. The immense majority of her cultural references, from movies to music groups, actors and actresses are foreign; her language is studded with English words (broker, overachiever, patchwork, grunge) and expressions of this language directly translated into Spanish. A large part of her world is that of a youth subculture defined by similar traits as those identified by Angela McRobbie (among others) in her studies of certain sectors of British youth. Cristina, furthermore, confesses to having read Foucault; her identification of some of the effects of different technologies identified by him on human conduct, especially with respect to her sisters and herself, could be evidence of this reading.

All of these circumstances seem to endow Cristina with the capacity for questioning and rejecting established truths regarding the relationships she maintains with her world and with herself; she is certainly a more sophisticated thinker than her sisters. Unlike Rosa, for whom the largest problem to be found in the professional space apparently is a local brand of machismo, Cristina problematizes this over-simplification. She shows a clear awareness of the general effects that the type of professional relationships promoted by multinational



companies have on the individual subject, as their objective is to incite employees to self-regulate their conduct. This is evident in the chapter “C de curro.” In it she describes her experience working for a computer multinational. There she learns against all odds about the less attractive aspects of progress. Consequently, she states, “progress has surpassed our original God in everything, including cruelty” (“el progreso ha superado al Dios original en todo, incluso en crueldad”) (33). She also learns to recognize the type of rhetoric used by the institution to heighten individuals’ desire for self-discipline: 1) individual effort is always recognized by a raise in status and/or salary (35), and 2) for every employee, there are four unemployed, equally well qualified persons ready to do whatever necessary to get that employee’s job (36). That is, she is cognizant of the impact of the ‘stick’ and the ‘carrot’ (reward and punishment) rhetorical game, and her use of the English terminology suggests that she recognizes it as a technique of capitalist rationale prevalent in contemporary liberal democracies. Because Cristina—unlike her sister Rosa—soon realizes her profound rejection of the values propagated by this socio-economic regime, she leaves her job after erasing all information contained on the hard drive of her computer, and solemnly declares that she would rather become a prostitute than work for a multinational company again (39). However, she never seems to become aware that, although her chosen lifestyle may permit the illusion of not participating, she in fact does not opt out, as her compulsive consumption of drugs, sex, music, and clothes proves.

Cristina’s personal narrative is shaped by her writing herself as a rebel, a non-conformist in the face of abstract systems. Consequently, she ridicules the moral order that the Catholic school imposes. She also rejects the language and affirmations of liberal feminism as well as the rationalizations and knowledge propagated by the pop-psychology experts. The ‘mental

problems' (176) that emerge in her 'abnormal' behavior have led her mother to send her regularly since she was an adolescent to consultations with psychologists, psychoanalysts, and psychiatrists. As a result of her prolific interaction with the experts on this field, Cristina not only feels well versed in this area, but also she is convinced she possesses a wide array of knowledge of the rationalizations most commonly associated with each one of these specialists. She even goes so far as to explain differences in the approach towards the human psyche among these three types of expert. It is precisely her conviction that she has a good understanding of these discourses that in her opinion authorize her to question the function of those institutions, as seen in the quotes that follow:

I have an excess of testosterone and she lacks serotonin. According to this excess and lack, our problems are in no way related to personal or family circumstances; they are related instead to the chemistry of our brain and ovaries. So, Freud, Lacan, Jung, Rogers, great job, darlings.

(A mí me sobra testosterona y a ella le falta serotonina. Y según estos excesos y carencia nuestros problemas no tiene nada que ver con las circunstancias personales o familiares sino con la composición química de nuestros cerebros y ovarios, así que Freud, Lacan, Jung, Rogers, os ha lucido el pelo, queridos) (26).

Psychoanalysts believe that an individual's problems can be solved if the person succeeds in isolating the Great Why, that particular occurrence that made one into who s/he is. Psychologists, on the other hand, insist on the need to modify personal conduct, thus breaking behavioral patterns that, according to psychoanalysts, have been caused by the Great Why.

(Los psicoanalistas creen que tus problemas pueden arreglarse si logras aislar el Gran Porqué, si logras encontrar el hecho particular que te convirtió en lo que eres: mientras que los psicólogos insisten en modificar la conducta, en tratar de alterar las pautas de comportamiento que, según los psicoanalistas, el Gran Porqué habría creado) (278).

Cristina, like her sisters, identifies the abandonment of her father and a later experience of sexual abuse at the hands of a cousin thirteen years older than herself as possible causes for her attacks of hysteria, depressions, and self-destructive practices. However, unlike her sisters, she maintains a totally disrespectful attitude regarding the validity of this explanation. In fact, she inverts the typical power relations between analyst and patient by selecting the information that she reveals about herself (284). It is precisely her experience of sexual abuse which she tells none of her medical doctors; this is due in part to her affirmation that “there have been worse first times” (282) than hers. Moreover, she affirms her promiscuity as something positive. The fact that pop-psychology usually considers promiscuity a typical pathology of those who suffer sexual abuse during childhood, and the fact that her mother and her sisters, influenced by the Catholic traditional moral code, find promiscuity reprehensible is something she takes in stride. She elaborates: “whatever the reason, that my father left us or that I have testosterone in excess, I am how I am and I like it, and I’m not willing to renounce the only tangible type of pleasure that life has to offer” (“sea porque mi padre nos dejó, sea porque me sobra testosterona, yo soy así y me gusta, y no me apetece renunciar al único placer tangible que la vida nos permite aprovechar”) (27). In the same way, she makes fun of Rosa’s “feminist sermons” (55) and questions some basic tenets of liberal feminism by affirming the pleasure she receives from being dominated during sex (166).

Nevertheless, these affirmations and scandalous behaviors can be re-interpreted simply as 'attitude' from the reading of the last chapter in the novel. In it, titled "Z de zenit", we witness a re-formulation of her opinions; the cynicism she has maintained throughout, that gives her a hard edge, disappears almost completely to make two basic affirmations regarding the rhetoric of liberal feminism and pop-psychology. This chapter opens with a reference to Lilith, the protagonist of an alternative story of the creation of the universe within the Judeo-Christian tradition. Her reason for doing this is that "Nowadays almost no one knows who Lilith is, although everybody knows the myth of Eve" ("Hoy en día casi nadie sabe quien era Lilith, aunque todo el mundo conoce el mito de Eva") (295-6). Following this reference to Lilith there is a list of renowned strong women who, she explains in a sermon-like tone, "made it to the pages of the Bible" ("se colaron entre las páginas de la Biblia") (296). Furthermore, she states that "strength means above all resilience, the ability not to break" ("fortaleza, significa sobre todo aguantar, no romperse"), an ability that she identifies as a "feminine virtue" (296). Consistent with this newly acquired role as executor of re-writing tradition to unearth worthy models for women, she re-writes the narratives that each of her sisters has offered up to reaffirm their individual ability not to break (in spite of the crisis that face them), thus offering the stories of Ana and Rosa as contemporary examples of strong women who will overcome their present difficulties. And it is from this position of 'woman writing her-story' that the novel concludes with a statement that sounds as innocent as if made by an adolescent who has just made a large discovery: "I have not told you it yet...my mother's name is Eve. However, I hope that we be the daughters of Lilith" ("No os lo he dicho todavía: mi madre se llama Eva. Pero espero que nosotras seamos hijas de Lilith.") (315)

With respect to the psychological disciplines, we see a similar development in spite of the fact that Cristina conserves part of her skepticism and makes a joke about how her family contributes to the bank accounts “of psychiatrists in Madrid.” She maintains throughout the last chapter a basic affirmation held as ‘truth’ by the experts of pop-psychology (and liberal rationalism), that which presupposes a coherent subject, a pure, authentic self, ready to be retrieved. Following the language and rationalizations of this discipline, Cristina interprets her sisters’ crises (and her own) as the beginning of personal transformation, a necessary step from their initial state of in-authenticity to one of authenticity by the end of the novel. Ana’s crisis leads her to divorce and begin to think for herself, or so we are told; Rosa decides to dispose of the Prozac that she has been taking for years and look inside herself to discover her genuine interests in a series of multiple vital aspects. Cristina learns that she is, perhaps, less different from her sisters than she has always thought: “my sister (Rosa) had taken refuge in her glassed-in office as I had taken refuge in my cyber-chic bar, as Anita had barricaded herself in her ‘Gastón and Daniela’ home” (“mi hermana se había refugiado en su despacho acristalado de la misma forma que yo me había guarecido en mi bar ciberchic, como Anita se había parapetado en su casa de Gastón y Daniela”) (315). Interestingly this is the first time in the novel that Cristina admits to herself to be undergoing a personal crisis; her somewhat ‘unstable state,’ a consequence of a recent romantic break-up, is never presented as a crisis in her personal narrative. Given Cristina’s previous mockery of the psychological disciplines and its experts, it is surprising to find her relating Rosa’s final discourse (and her total agreement with it), a discourse plagued by the language of pop-psychology. Further surprising is her newly acquired belief in the premise that a crisis always

yields a lesson for one to learn, and that once this lesson is learned the person becomes a better, happier individual, truer to herself.

The modernity that weaves through Amor, curiosidad, prozac y dudas does not necessarily mean real advancement or progress with respect to the conditions in which the female subject is formed. Rather, a slight difference may be noted; in the context of this new western liberal democracy immersed in late capitalism—Spain—we find the presence of new abstract systems that join those already existent to hinder, rather than facilitate, women's understanding of themselves and the world around them. The use that Ana and Rosa make of the language and rationalizations of pop-psychology and liberal feminism prove this argument; they serve, at least within this novel, the function of hiding the impact that other technologies of capitalist rationale have on the individual, especially those of marketing and consumption. Ana and Rosa devote their existence to achieving a certain life style; one realizes this through the right marriage to the right candidate, and the other vis-à-vis her exclusive dedication to professional success. By their early thirties, however, they realize that their achievements do not make them happy and they begin to wonder why. Both characters proceed to identify the reasons for their unhappiness by trying to discern their true, authentic selves from their present state of self-perceived in-authenticity. In doing so, they draw on pop-psychology and liberal feminism to explain their respective crisis as the result of 1) semi-pathologies produced by childhood traumas, and 2) the demands of their traditional, Catholic, and masculinist local culture. They do not consider that their feelings of in-authenticity could be related to their option for consumption and social success, and the fact that their chosen life styles do not yield the happiness that they once promised. Something similar could be said of Cristina, in spite of her rebel pose; her fun and irreverent

affirmations challenge some of the tenets of these abstract global systems only to further validate them in the end, as we have seen.

The Spanish society portrayed in Amor, curiosidad, prozac y dudas contains all of the ingredients of late modernity: there is a Generation X condemned to ephemeral relationships and uncertainty about the future (45); there are immigrants who are criminalized by the police for their supposedly illegal activities (247), the people Ana and the likes of her refuse to hire (101-102); there are yuppies who continue to displace those less fortunate living in particular neighborhoods (139); there are drug addicts sleeping on the streets (122), while the rich detoxify in private clinics; and there are gypsies that continue to occupy the margins of society (116), as has always been the case. However, the reference to these social realities in the novel seems to have the function of affirming Spain's arrival into modernity (or, the modernity of Spain), rather than questioning or condemning the political, economic and cultural structures that produce those realities. For, as Nikolas Rose stresses, the rhetoric of individual responsibility concerning personal betterment and advancement suggests that those who occupy the margins of society do so because "through willfulness, incapacity or ignorance [they] cannot or will not exercise such responsibility" (145). In other words, their exclusion or marginality is a consequence of their own doing.

Ideological ambivalence permeates the novel whose narrative discourse, like Cristina, in the end affirms and celebrates the abstract systems that sustain modernity. Lucía Etxebarria observes certain tendencies in our contemporary, economically developed world, but she does not question either 1) "what forms of life are the aims, ideals or exemplars of these different practices" (Rose, 133); or 2) whether, as Rose asserts, it may be the case "that the

general strategic field of all those programmes of government that regard themselves as liberal has been defined by the problem of how free individuals can be governed such that they enact their freedom appropriately” (134). The declarations that the author makes regarding the freedom and autonomy of the self within the context of global capitalist rationale deliver a cogent message: the self is solely responsible for its unhappiness; the contours of late modernity, and the multiple abstract systems that function within it to shape self into subject (i. e. forms of subjectification), have no connection with that unhappiness. In other words, Etxebarria’s acceptance of expert systems, such as pop-psychology and liberal feminism, seems to hinder her understanding of them as normalizing discourses and their negative impact on female subject formation.

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### **Electronic Resources**



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