

Textual Violence and the Hyperreal in *De todo lo visible y lo invisible* by Lucía Etxebarria

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In *De todo lo visible y lo invisible* (2001) Lucía Etxebarria manipulates traditional narrative structure in order to challenge preconceived notions of the reader/writer relationship. Roland Barthes famously has noted the absence of the author and the primacy of language and textual complexity, nevertheless he still maintains that the “sway of the Author remains powerful” (143). In a movement that resuscitates Barthes’s dead author and gives new importance to the powerful sway of the author in narrative, many contemporary Spanish writers have turned to a self-conscious novelistic form.¹ Meta-narrative produces novels that comment on the art of writing and posits the writer as protagonist and the creation of the story a suspenseful plot. In addition, many Spanish writers are challenging distinctions between history, fiction, and reality in an attempt to foster a new kind of literary product that draws on cultural discourse and not just on literary models. Therefore, the author reveals himself or herself in the text, showing the complicated process of capturing “reality” in fiction. However, unlike the deliberate authorial presence in much of Javier Cercas’s work, for example, Etxebarria remains decidedly vague while aggressively suggesting the crossover between textual and extra-textual reality. In this essay I will show how Etxebarria creates a textual hyperreality through ruptures, incisions, and breaks in the textual space of the novel.

According to Jean Baudrillard, hyperreality is a product of mass consumerism that creates an image or artistic product that is completely self-referential, self-contained, and free from any notion of legitimacy. What is real and what is fiction becomes blurred in the convergence of commercial and literary spaces where the characters and narrative voice invite the reader to participate and decipher the textual puzzle. Baudrillard’s ideas focus primarily on concepts of reality and while he posits that capitalism and massive consumerism have led to distorted views of reality, his theories are helpful in understanding the new vein of meta-narrative in Spain. Not unlike Walter Benjamin’s preoccupation with the loss of a work of art’s aura or originality in the age of photography, film, and video, Baudrillard’s concerns revolve around the false sense of reality that regenerated images produce. The market creates images that consumers adopt as “real” and necessary thus basing basic lifestyle decisions on false information. For example, the clothes we buy project a certain image or not and therefore we buy these clothes not to keep us warm or to cover our skin but rather to pertain to a certain group or not. The function of the product, in this case clothes, ceases to be based on any kind of realistic necessity and instead presents an image or concept. Thus, according to Baudrillard the reason or reality of the purchase is completely illusory and becomes a simulacra of the “real” function of clothes.

In literature this simulacra takes into account varying levels of social and cultural consciousness while exposing the constructedness not only of culture but also of narrative and language. Etxebarria pinpoints the tenuous relationship between a created fictional reality and the world in which we live. The language and structure of *De todo lo visible y lo invisible* breaks with the illusion of fiction and proposes a novel that flows between the world of the text, and the world of the reader. The novel creates its own “reality” independent of notions of “truth” or representational value. In order to better understand the creation of a narrative hyperreality, I

will briefly discuss Etxebarria's creation of a public persona that in some way parallels her literary project.

Lucía Etxebarria's public persona has overshadowed, at times, the value of her literary production.² As Christine Henseler notes, Etxebarria has "enchanted and bemused some, angered and alienated others" ("Ecstasy" 109). The controversy surrounding her self-promotional web site, nude photo spreads, and generally anti-establishment antics has attracted not only media but critical attention as well. Despite what one may think about her public persona, her award-winning novels offer a unique glimpse into the trappings of twenty-first century female identity. Through the incorporation of contemporary cultural references, feminist and gender issues, and a keen sense of what it means to be living in the twenty-first century, Etxebarria has produced novels that challenge the notion of culturally produced feminine identity.

Several critics have approached her works as vestiges of a culture clash between literature and the publishing market (Tsuchiya, Henseler). Etxebarria's ubiquitous appearances in the media confirm the author's ideology that a malleable image is an important tool in self-promotion. Nevertheless, the relationship between her body and her body of works always remains outside of the textual realities she creates in her novels. The ever-changing persona that she presents to the market and media cannot alter the textual specificity of her works. As Henseler points out, Etxebarria seems intent on changing the dynamics between author and reader. She uses the media to force readers into "a new kind of relationship with the traditionally absent author" ("Ecstasy" 199). The intimacy that Etxebarria seeks with her public is apparent in *De todo lo visible y lo invisible*. The play between the implied author's creative reality, the narrator's familiarity with the reader and the reader's role in constructing the story produces an intimate tone that seduces the reader and drives the narrative forward. In this sense, Etxebarria has created an extra-textual literary project that creates a simulacra of intimacy with her readers through her web site and visibility in the media that translates to the tone and structure of *De todo lo visible*.

Many of Etxebarria's novels revolve around individual isolation and a misunderstanding between established social contracts and individual desire. Her characters often lose themselves in alcohol or drugs in search of their place in society. *De todo lo visible* is no different in this regard; but the novel's experimental structure and textual aberrations echo the protagonist's psychological and physical manifestations of violence. Etxebarria's narratives dwell on the body as a locus for change and a site of abandonment. Jessica Folkart describes the overriding metaphor of the body in Etxebarria's novel *Beatriz y los cuerpos celestes* as a site of containment: "all the spaces in this text house bodies in pain, where physical pain becomes an expression of or a diversion from psychological pain" (45). Folkart analyzes the novel in terms of narrative structure and reveals the complex play between Beatriz's pain and the power of language. Folkart explains "the narrator resorts to the written Word to utter her existence into being and to comprehend it as an ongoing process of dialogue with a reader, yielding a new perspective on the bodies involved" (50). Thus the physical pain that Beatriz suffers must be displaced to the text in order to reestablish her sense of self. It is this kind of textual violence that comes to the surface in *De todo lo visible*. The protagonist, Ruth, inflicts pain on herself through several suicide attempts and resorts to physical violence when she cracks a bottle over the head of her estranged lover, Juan. The rupture and dislocation of the narrative manifests itself in the structure of the text. The violence Ruth experiences leaps off the page as the

disjointed narrative depends on footnotes, on visual aides, and on the author's interruptions to complete the fictional reality.

Rhetoric designed to seduce the reader into narrative compliance has appeared throughout the history of Spanish letters. One only has to think of the *Quijote* or *La familia de Pascual Duarte* to see evidence of the author distancing himself from his work through extra-textual framing of the narrative. Many of the Latin American pre-*Boom* and *Boom* writers used similar narrative tropes to confuse the relationship between author, narrator, and reader as well. Etxebarria's use of notes to gloss her own text blurs the division between created and lived reality, or between narrative voice, implied author, and real author. She uses this narrative style to question specifically female consciousness within the novel and the often-troubled relationship between women and the media. The tone the narrator adapts toward her subject reveals the tension between gender and language.

Jean Baudrillard does not address questions of gender as does Etxebarria but instead he analyzes the relationship between language and "reality" when he claims: "Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal." (1). He refers to the postmodern notion that art is independent of reality. Contemporary art does not reflect or try to represent reality in any way, rather it is self-referential and fully self-contained. Etxebarria creates a virtual reality within the novelistic genre and creates a self-sufficient literary world through three non-conventional narrative tropes: first, she visually breaks up the paragraph structure, second, she uses footnotes throughout the novel, and third, within the text of the footnotes she suggests that the protagonist is, in fact, a real person. This game between fictional and actual identity becomes a satirical commentary on the reality of the novel. The text relies heavily on narration and textual space to question specifically the role of the author, narrator, and reader. In this case, Etxebarria not only creates a voice for the implied author, but also insists on drawing her protagonist out of the textual space and into the world of marketing and media that has come to define in part her own public persona. The confusion between the character's fictional life and her supposed existence in "our" world outside of the story allows the reader to participate on various levels in the creation of the literary project. We are at once observers of the actions and reactions of the characters in the novel but at the same time we permit the author to cross the normal boundaries of narrative construction. The playfulness of the footnotes and visual cascading of words on the page may seem gratuitous to the storyline, but in an effort to reveal various levels of experience, of what poet William Blake called the realms of the visible and invisible, Etxebarria carefully constructs a reading of the novel through the deconstruction of traditional narrative.³

Another innovation of the novel is Etxebarria's use of textual violence or the disruption of normative reading patterns. In *De todo lo visible y lo invisible*, Etxebarria explores violence thematically and structurally. The novel revolves around the doomed love affair and multiple suicide attempts of famous film director Ruth Swanson. Throughout the novel, Ruth is the "other woman" in her relationship with Juan and his reluctance to break up with his long-time girlfriend creates such emotional violence that it eventually becomes physical when Ruth tries to end her life. Fame also violates Ruth's space and identity. The constant judgment of her art, lifestyle, and physical appearance by strangers leaves her exposed and vulnerable to the superficial opinions of others. But what is most intriguing about Ruth's story is the structural violence of the narrative. I use violence in this sense to refer to visual aberrations from normal paragraph structure, the constant meta-textual musings of the implied author, and the use of footnotes in a work of fiction. These textual ruptures in turn create a narrative reality and an

extra-textual reality at the same time indicating that Ruth Swanson is the text's protagonist but insisting that she lives in our world as well. The text then supports a fictional reality and an extra-fictional reality created from within the textual space, thus reflecting Baudrillard's hyperreal.

The first example is the cascading syntax found throughout the first part of the novel suggesting Ruth's coming in and out of consciousness as she lies in a hospital bed recovering from her second suicide attempt. The stylistic recourse has been described as a narrative tool that "expresa el proceso de hundimiento y recuperación, tras un intento de suicidio" (Goicoechea 119). The thematic violence of the narrative is reflected in the disjointed structure on the page. On five different occasions in the first chapter the word *bajando* is repeated four times in decreasing font size that reads from right to left. Reading from right to left instead of the standard left to right forces us into an alternate way of reading and interpreting. Not only are we reading backwards, but also this act symbolically refers to the alternate reality of Ruth's subconscious that is revealed through this non-traditional way of reading. The broken sentence signals a rupture in the fictive reality allowing us to enter into subconscious thought and see that the conscious and subconscious are tenuously linked through language. The other moments of rupture occur when the word *subiendo* reads from left to right and in increasing font size. This pulls us back into the narrative reality out of the depths of Ruth's subconscious.⁴

The increasing and decreasing font size suggests an aural complexity as well. The decreasing font size eventually reduces the narrative voice to a whisper and we can hear the real world fading away as Ruth's inner thoughts come to life. Just the opposite is true for the increase in font size with the words *subiendo*. We are drawn back into the surrounding noises and distractions of the social interaction of everyday life. However, this phenomenon reverses as the words *bajando* appear twice reading from left to right and the words *subiendo* appear twice from right to left. The word play creates a visual pattern important to the text that suggests both fluidity and rupture. The breakage that appears in the text forms a pattern that connects the larger paragraphs. In this way Etxebarria has managed to meld contradicting terms and make the narrative read as one long thought process. The author uses the cascading words to unite two distinct worlds residing in the mind of one protagonist. The syntactical manipulations reflect Ruth's psychological fluctuations and the fissure between her emotional state and her reality. The motion of the words on the page suggests interaction between reader and text and subsequently a movement to different levels of meaning. Ruth clearly moves from her subconscious (invisible) to the conscious or visible world around her. The reader becomes involved not only in the psychological process of Ruth's recovery but also in the physical ups and downs of her recuperation. The emphasis on the mind's capacity to move from one realm of consciousness to another is reflected in the physical words on the page. Just as Folkart has analyzed the importance of the body as locus of experience in *Beatriz*, in *De todo lo visible* as well the body becomes tantamount as a visible space of emotional experience.

The narrator repeatedly refers to Ruth's physical appearance, her clothes, the brilliant red color of her hair, and the general discomfort she feels about her own body. The preoccupation with looks and particularly the predominantly female dissatisfaction with body type translates to the discomfort of the narrative experience as the reader encounters atypical syntax. Ruth's criticisms of her own body translate to the disruption and unsettled reading provoked by the cascading words on the page. Significantly, the pages with the broken text and cascading words appear early in the book and establish the tone for a non-traditional reading of the text. The

breaking of the paragraphs within the text suggests a breaking with tradition that requires a new and different interpretation of the relationship between form and content.

Official documentation of fictional events is another textual strategy that stretches the boundaries of the narrative reality and expresses the symbolic link between form and content. The first few pages of the novel introduce us to Ruth in a cloudy state of mind, drifting in and out of a dream world. The novel opens with Ruth's musings: "Duermo, duermo, duermo, duermo, soy un árbol, un vegetal, y pienso, pienso, pienso, pienso. . ." (17). The crescendo of the cascading word *subiendo* draws her out of her dream and immediately a third person narrator takes over: "Cuando Ruth abre los ojos no alcanza, al principio, a entender lo que pasa" (17). The different psychological levels are marked not only by the words rupturing the paragraph on the page but also by the appearance of a new narrator, a removed omniscient observer that relates the action. Four pages later the narrator disappears altogether and Ruth's formal admission papers appear in the text. The short lines of words and numbers typed onto an already existing form reject any notion of reflection or interpretation. The address of the clinic appears at the top of the form and subsequently we read "INFORME DE URGENCIAS" (21) that declares the form's purpose is to relay information without commentary. The form includes a social security number, an address, and the following information:

"mujer, 33a.

M.C. Intoxicación medicamentosa.

Paciente traída por el 061, que refiere que la paciente se ha tomado 65 c de Orfidal y 45 c de Lexatín hace 5 h. La paciente se niega a que se la ponga SNG y se niega a colaborar." (21)

The numbers, drug names, and official diagnosis present a contrasting version of the events. The precise clinical analysis lacks emotion and brings to the narrative an outside assessment of the situation. As readers, we no longer have to rely on Ruth for information or trust her version of the story. This document gives us the supposed facts and in doing so exposes the sharp contrast between hospital protocol and personal experience. We rely on Ruth's version of her hospital experience to ground us in the text and provide an entrance into the character, yet with the inclusion of a hospital document the narrative becomes caught between two versions of "reality." The novel creates its own reality with the document acting as a sharp reminder of the routine nature of Ruth's tragedy. The hyperreality of the novel becomes self-sufficient as the fictional experience is supported by an official-looking document that represents an actual admission form.⁵

The document reflects administrative procedures for admitting patients to the clinic and includes only practical information. "Ruth de Siles Swanson" appears on the form and we see her birthday, her address, and her social security number. The incorporation of a character into an official-looking document that displays her address (calle Echagaray) and other pertinent information plays with the creative narrative convention. Ruth is presented as a person who lives in Madrid and claims all of the rights and privileges of a citizen. The clinic Etxebarria cites in the novel, Fundación Jiménez Díaz, does exist at the given address, Avenida de los Reyes Católicos, 2, 28040 Madrid. Therefore, our protagonist finds herself with official documents admitting her to a clinic that does exist and in this way the line between fact and fiction becomes blurred especially in the sense that we have both a testimonial account of the events and the entrance papers "confirming" the time and date of Ruth's arrival. The official document placed side by

side the unofficial, muddled recollections of the patient plays with the mixing of actual information and fictional invention. In this way, Etxebarria creates a self-sufficient textual space that does not distinguish between facts inside or outside the textual boundaries.

Another textual invasion that dislodges the reader's attention is the curious use of footnotes throughout the novel. As a way of interjecting new information and creating an intimate relationship with the reader the footnotes demand that the reader's gaze and attention be redirected to the bottom of the page. This abrupt shifting of eyes and mind gives the novel an academic feel since it is usually only in scholarly works that we see footnotes.⁶ Etxebarria manipulates this form in her novel giving the text several levels of meaning. Etxebarria combines fact and fiction in her use of footnotes. The narrative discourse takes on multiple layers of meaning and "reality" as the footnotes expand the characters' lives beyond the fictional world they occupy. Through this kind of narrative rhetoric, Etxebarria creates layers of reality from within the novel and creates a meta-textual commentary highlighting the constructedness of narrative and of the reader's relation to it.

In the novel, the presence of the implied author guides the narrative with its interruptions and commentary. Wayne Booth describes the implied author as "the intuitive apprehension of a completed artistic whole" (73) or the voice that establishes tone throughout the narrative. The tone or attitude the narrative voice takes toward her subject creates a unique fictional reality that guides the reader through the text. Tone allows the reader to form an opinion about the actions and reactions of characters in the novel with the help of the narrative voice that represents the overriding viewpoint and attitude of the implied author. The tone of *De todo lo visible* vacillates between apologetic and ironic, presenting Ruth as a survivor yet at the same time self-destructive. The footnotes in the novel break dramatically with the narration and we hear the implied author's voice rise distinctly above the narrative as it makes references to "real" people, provides us with the protagonist's email address or chides a character's ignorance. The narrative ramifications of footnotes as a structural transgression in the novel create a different kind of authorial presence. Etxebarria plays with the idea of confusing the "real" with the implied author by drawing the reader out of the narrative space and into a footnote that cites familiar places, names, and facts. The reader is momentarily duped into thinking she hears the author's voice guiding her through the text. This momentary lapse of narrative structure induced by the use of footnotes connotes a momentary rupture of the fictional reality created by the implied author.

In this sense the implied author becomes a scrim that seems to reveal the presence of the "real" author lurking behind the scenes. "[T]hough the author can to some extent choose his disguises, he can never choose to disappear" (Booth 20). Booth echoes Barthes's assertion that the author always leaves some kind of imprint on his or her work. But in this case, Etxebarria uses a trope that makes the reader believe in a false intimacy with the main character of the novel and by extension with the author herself. By breaking down the metaphorical walls that divide reader/author/character, the text allows for moments of familiarity that seem sincere until the structure of the novel re-emerges and places reader, narrator, author and implied author neatly back into place. Etxebarria knows her readers well, she understands the need to connect on a personal level with the characters of a novel and in a calculated move that invites the reader further into the narrative structure she creates false intimacy between them. Nevertheless, the text exists intact as a system of narrative devices that incorporates meta-narrative commentary in order to create a self-sufficient world or fictional "reality" that neatly alludes to readers' personal experience.

The nature of the notes is at times informative and at others critical. Two notes comment on the redundancy in the text. The voice of the implied author appears in the note offering textual commentary and aligning herself with the observations of the supposed reader. In the main body of the text appears: “Juan anotaba cada infidelidad a Biotza con meticulosa obsesividad culpable; etcétera, etcétera” (283) here we run into the superscripted number one and we read the footnote “Vale, vale...Esto ya lo habíamos dicho” (283). On the next page after a lengthy analysis of the problems in Ruth and Juan’s relationship we read note two: “También lo habíamos dicho” (284). This type of footnote found throughout the novel anticipates the reader’s reaction to the body of the text and in a meta-textual criticism highlights the repetitiveness of the text. In bringing to light this fault, the implied author scolds the narrator for potentially boring the reader. The intimacy created between reader and implied author emerges in the tone and physical textual space, for the footnote is a separate text, removed from the main body and pulls the reader into a world of multiple realities constructed in the novel.

In other cases the notes bridge the gap between the novelistic reality and the reader’s reality by alluding to popular cultural icons. For example, the protagonist Ruth remembers certain events at Shangay Lily’s birthday party. The footnote explains “Polifacético y subyugador personaje muy conocido en el ambiente artístico de Madrid. Actor, escritor, tertuliano de radio, presentador de televisión y unas cuantas cosas más, amén de feminista convencido” (303). The footnote is anything but objectively informative. The added note on Shangay Lily fails to cite specific information about his birth or published works but instead provides only a personal evaluation of his contribution to popular culture. The comment highlights the presence of Lily in Spanish culture but fails to give the reader any concrete information about him. The cultural specificity of the footnote demands that readers be familiar with the works and presence of Shangay Lily in order to fully appreciate the implications of the attitude projected in the text.⁷ His extroverted sense of self that comes from years of struggle and rejection because of his sexual orientation has become Shangay Lily’s trademark. His keen sense of humor and humanity have made him widely popular in Spanish television and in the press. Ruth’s friendship with such a personality in the novel elevates her persona to the level of stardom enjoyed by Shangay Lily. Ruth reaches beyond the borders of her fictional life and into the realm of a Madrid social scene populated by highly successful artists. The footnote alluding to the great achievements of Shangay Lily in terms of Spanish cultural production firmly place the reader’s sympathies with him as well.

Another cultural reference specific to Spanish artistic production provides a more blatant transgression of novelistic boundaries. In the main text Ruth’s film is harshly reviewed as pornographic and uninspired. Her reputation is damaged but the film does extremely well at the box office and is chosen as one of few films of first-time directors at the Cannes Film Festival. The footnote that follows this episode in the text claims: “Esta historia está basada en un hecho real: Dunia Ayaso y Félix Sabroso rodaron Fea con un millón de pesetas” (91). The footnote goes on to explain how the filmmakers both applied for VISA credit cards and used the line of credit to make the film after their bank loans had been rejected. Unfortunately their film was never produced professionally but the footnote states: “En cualquier caso, si queréis obtener una copia en vídeo de esta obra magna, podéis contactar con Félix Sabroso a través de la siguiente dirección de e-mail: amorylujo@infonegocio.com” (91). The familiar tone of the footnote with its use of the second person plural and the email address breaks with the narrative tone of the body of the text. The direct address to the readers immediately creates a community outside of the narrative. The reader is not alone with the text but part of a larger connected group that has

immediate access to the “real” filmmaker through digital technology. The novel uses email correspondence in this way to heighten the sense of intimacy not only between the implied author and reader but also between readers themselves. This break in the narrative action adds to the multilayered structure of the novel creating a specific discourse of interrelationships that ultimately define the textual space. The reader becomes complicit in generating textual reality that in this case draws on fictional characters and allusions to “real” stories that heighten the sense of intimacy between fiction and “reality.”

However, the collaborative efforts of reader and narrator to build the textual reality of the novel produce a fabricated version of intimacy. As mentioned earlier, the hyperreal is a self-sufficient system that creates its own references without problematizing the accuracy or “truth” of the information shared. Etxebarria does not concern herself with the accuracy of the information provided. As noted with her inclusion of Miss Shangay Lily and the two filmmakers, these figures provide a symbolic bridge between the text and the current cultural production in Madrid. The referent itself is less important than the fact that it appears in a novel as a tool to create a narrative world that seems to totter between fiction and fact. The footnotes that refer to the text are a mechanism of self-referentiality that gives the text an illusion of authority. The footnotes serve to seduce the reader into taking part in the circular notion of the hyperreality. Another example of a footnote that uses email as a tool to call the reader to action plays with various textual levels of meaning and illusion.

The footnote contains an email address found in a letter written by Ruth and reproduced in the body of the text. Early in the novel, the letter plays an important role in Ruth’s seduction of Juan and in the textual seduction of the reader. The narrative voice in the text assures us that this letter represents Ruth’s interest in Juan and that she feels attracted to him “porque confirmaba su propia existencia” (153). The letter appears as a separate document that reproduces these feelings of dependency and attraction. The written words confirm Ruth’s feelings and the letter survives outside of the text as a document passed between the two characters. For Ruth it is not necessarily Juan who confirms her existence but rather the written words in the letter that represent her feelings toward him. The act of writing and then sending the letter confirms her feelings and existence while on a meta-textual level the “document” confirms her existence within the realm of the textual reality.

The play on text in this section multiplies as first we read the narrative voice, then Ruth’s voice in the letter, and finally the second narrative voice in the footnote. Ruth closes her letter writing: “no tengo teléfono, o más bien, nunca lo cojo, pero tengo una dirección de email: ruthswanson@espasa.es. Puedes enviarme un e-mail, o si no tienes cómo hacerlo, escribirme a casa” (153). Immediately after the email address a superscripted number one indicates a footnote. Is this footnote part of Ruth’s letter meant for Juan to see or only for us readers of the novel? We jump down the page to the footnote that addresses us readers in the informal vosotros declaring “La dirección existe, y podéis escribir a Ruth si queréis. Pero ella nunca os responderá. Eso sí, yo leeré las cartas, y le transmitiré los mensajes” (153). We recognize part of the email address as that of the publisher of the book we are holding in our hands, Espasa, and this adds an official mark to the fictionalized email. Obviously Ruth is a character in a book, but the publisher Espasa certainly exists, we hold the proof in our hands. Yet the voice of the footnote assures us that any effort to contact Ruth is already futile as there will never be a response. And who is the “yo” in the footnote? Who will read the emails and forward them to Ruth? The use of the first person draws attention to the constructedness of the narrative, for there is an author or presence that seems to be overseeing the course of the narrative. But at the same

time this effort to become intimate with the reader demands that we see fiction as fiction. The “yo” of the footnote will read and pass on to Ruth all the emails sent to the given address acknowledging the separate identity of author, narrator, and protagonist. Nevertheless, contrary to the stylized efforts to forge a “real” identity for Ruth her existence is thrown into dubious light. The voice of the footnote explains that Ruth will never respond suggesting that she is incapable of responding. The word “never” puts finality to the fiction and confirms for us readers that Ruth is, of course, a character in a novel. The text mocks the role of the reader, for who would ever believe that footnotes in a novel were truthful and send an email to a protagonist’s address?⁸ Yet the inclusion of this footnote stands as a testament to the successful seduction of the reader and the blurring of fictional and non-fictional realities. The author here cleverly reminds us that Ruth and her story are, in fact, fiction. She assumes we have fallen somewhat prey to the extra-textual devices that claim otherwise and the email address that can never be answered by Ruth, because she does not exist, snaps the reader back into the fictional reality of the text.

All of the narrative elements that create the rhetoric in *De todo lo visible* lead to a new way for the author to relate to her audience. The intimate tone and direct address in the novel builds a multi-tiered narrative that plays with established literary relationships between author, implied author, narrator, and reader. Etxebarria breaks down these barriers and changes the way we read the text by de-centering traditional notions of structure and discourse. The discourse, or the way we read, relates to Booth’s tone of the implied author. The attitude toward the subject of the novel becomes the attitude toward the reader in Etxebarria’s footnotes. The notes usurp the narrative space and place the reader directly into the novel as an accomplice to the narrative act. Christine Henseler observes that Etxebarria’s personal website foments this intimacy between author and reader. On the website appears personal data and anecdotes but “[m]ore important than the information that Etxebarria publicizes is that readers enter a new kind of relationship with the traditionally absent author” (119). This new kind of relationship between reader and author is apparent in *De todo lo visible* as well. The absent author, who is never completely absent from the text according to Booth and Barthes, emerges not as the flesh and blood writer but rather as an ideology toward the text. This is indeed the virtual author who leaves fingerprints on the structure and discourse of the novel by multiplying her identity so that the reader becomes seduced into thinking that our author has allowed us into a private “reality.”

What can we conclude from this use of footnotes and visual cascading syntax in Etxebarria’s novel? The visual exercise of the novel, of reading up and down forward and backward and jumping to footnotes within the novel suggests a break within the literary genre. The activity of reading non-traditionally brings a discourse of violence and rupture to a syntactic level. The violations of the page, the paragraph, and the narrative flow all reflect the emotional and psychological violence that pushes Ruth to act out through suicide. This kind of experimental writing blurs the boundaries between author, text, and reader. We readers are invited to participate in creating the text in numerous and unexpected ways.

The self-contained reality of the novel becomes a space of a virtual relationship. Etxebarria exploits the virtual aspects of email as a form of instant communication that creates a false intimacy with a fictional character. The virtual aspect of culture as explained by Baudrillard converts the representation of something into the referent making the image or reproduction the reality of the event. In Etxebarria’s novel the structure becomes the referent and through the incorporation of cultural artifacts and people into the narrative the textual “reality” acquires an autobiographical sense. Yet the text is ultimately only self-referential precisely because it

regards itself as a referent. The fictional text as referent is the basis of the novel's hyperreality. Instead of trying to imitate reality or everyday life, *De todo lo visible* recreates a world that revolves around and exists through various layers of text and narrative voice. The artistic need to present cultural phenomenon such as the novel, or writing in general, in challenging ways can attest to the thriving literary production in contemporary Spain. While at times negatively criticized in Spain, Etxebarria has come to the forefront of contemporary authors who test boundaries and push limits. As Henseler has pointed out, some critics and readers see her manipulations of the media as shameless self-promotion while others find great value in her dedication to analyze an unjust society for women and minorities and confront polemical feminist issues. The conversation can be expanded to include her unique handling of narrative structure and style. The playfulness with which she approaches the text reveals a certain alliance between the high art of writing literature and the influence of popular culture.

Notes

¹ See Samuel Amago's study *True Lies* for in-depth analysis of self-reflexivity in contemporary Spanish narrative.

² Etxebarria's recent encounter with plagiarism placed her at odds with psychologist Jorge Castelló who claims that Etxebarria's self-help book, *Ya no sufro por amor*, lifts word for word entire paragraphs of his article "Dependencia emocional y violencia doméstica" (Collera 1). However, this is not the first time Etxebarria has faced the authorities concerning her work. In 2003 she was charged with plagiarizing poet Antonio Colinas in her book of poetry *Estación de infierno*. These charges were later dropped with the help of the testimony of several well-known scholars ("Tres expertos" 1). Etxebarria seems professionally undaunted by these allegations and, on the contrary, tries to take advantage of the attention as her web blog demonstrates. She comments on the personal trauma caused by Castelló's accusations and calls them a "bonito escándalo tan bien orquestado" ("Rodríguez" blog). Although the tone of her comments is flippant, she certainly does not take this kind of media exposure lightly. Instead she makes a point of reaching out to her loyal readers to rally support.

³ In an interview in 2000, Etxebarria explains that the title of the novel comes from a William Blake poem (Escabias 202).

⁴ The text reads thus:

"Bajando
Bajando
Bajando
Bajando
Grité cuando la sangre se convirtió en savia. . .no queda más remedio que volver a subir y seguir subiendo
subiendo subiendo subiendo subiendo subiendo y
Subiendo
Subiendo
Subiendo
Subiendo" (18)

⁵ One must assume that the hospital form is a creation of the author too. Her effort to include practical information and empty spaces for the discharge time and date, as well as an address of the clinic suggests that Etxebarria is familiar with the clinic and with such forms.

⁶ Most scholarly works use endnotes instead of footnotes so as to give the reader the option of flipping back and forth in the text or avoiding endnote supplementation altogether. With endnotes, the main text flows easier without the distraction at the bottom of the page, but the interested reader must search to locate the pertinent information. Etxebarria's footnotes are meant to disrupt the narrative flow.

⁷ Shangay Lily (1963) has published four books, including the popular *Machistófeles* in 2002. His website www.shangaylily.com reveals his dedication to gay rights through a witty and provocative diary and autobiographical sketch.

⁸ I know several readers that sent emails to Ruth (Etxebarria) at the address indicated and, as promised in the text, they never received a response.

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