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Chapter 4

Guadalupe Loaeza's Blonded Ambition: Lip-Synching, Plagiarism, and Power Poses

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When trying to think beyond the stereotypes about Guadalupe Loaeza that cast her as a ditzy *señora*, it proves helpful to place her in context with other femme intellectuals in the Mexican media. The genealogy begins at least with late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century feminized bohemian Mexican poets Amado Nervo and Ramón López Velarde, who helped to make the non-masculine endeavor of poetry writing more visible and even respected. Significantly for my argument, these poets paid homage to romantic themes in their poetry and cultivated a sort of noble aesthetic sensibility in their clothes. Decked out in a beribboned diplomatic jacket (think Michael Jackson's Sergeant Pepper wear) and a black dandy coat respectively, Nervo and López Velarde paved the way for other more extravagantly dressed writers to gain visibility as notable citizens. The successors include eccentric twentieth-century Mexican literary stars and television personalities Salvador Novo and Guadalupe Amor, and, some years later, Juan José Arreola. These celebrities' public appearances drew on varying combinations of outrageous femininity and blatant sexuality to support their claims of singular artistic ability and sparkling intellectual talent. Loaeza had in common with Arreola and Amor the struggle to define herself as a capable thinker who never attended a university. The feminized act attracted public attention, but came at the cost of reducing connotations of intellectual authority and depth. Mexican writers' lack of control over the

reception of their performances leads me to Joseph Epstein's notion of the "publicity intellectual," who trades not on knowledge, but on self-exposure as a main source of power (21). This power flows along a two-way current.

The public figure at best manipulates the revelation of his or her self in the media, but cannot also determine the interpretation of that self-presentation. This incomplete control over one's own public image presents a special challenge to celebrities who would be famous for their brain work, because when playing to a general audience, it is best for those who want to be admired for their rational intellectual ability to style themselves in an image of reasoned control. Fame thus works to limit legitimacy when it comes to public thinkers' credibility as rational and exceptional minds. By contrast, fame works the opposite effect for "artistic talents," and perhaps deepens a popular conception that opposes artistic creativity to rational thought. Artists are often believed to be legitimately "crazy," and because their uncontrolled or "wild" public images can aid a creative reputation, they seem at home on television. The media, in turn, comes to favor heavily the presence of artists rather than intellectuals. It is germane to review the stereotypes that often cast masculine characteristics as linked to reason, authority, and control, while the feminine can connote the unreasonable and a lack of authoritative power. There is something feminizing about modern fame, then, and this renunciation of reason and control in one's public image works against a media personality who would wish to be recognized for his or her analytical abilities. This effect becomes even more pronounced for exposed personalities on television who lack (or disguise, in Novo's case) masculine-associated intellectual credentials such as a university degree or a legitimating job title.

An example of the humiliation that awaits the feminine-sympathetic and self-publicizing writer surfaces with Reyna Barrera's account of the sordid side of Salvador Novo's relationship with Jacobo Zabludovsky. Novo used to reminisce about a bygone Mexico City on Friday night newscasts of *24 Horas*—in much the same theme as Loaeza's later nostalgic pieces about the city and its famous occupants. Loaeza and Novo also share the feminine publicity act, which risks a compromised image. Take Novo's last days in 1973, when the newspaper columnist landed in the hospital due to fatal complications of a weight-loss treatment. Anchorman Zabludovksy burst into the hospital room with camera at the ready to film Novo live, and caught the writer without his toupee, without his habitual makeup, without proper clothing, and reaching with embarrassment

for his dentures (Barrera, 253). Another tale of televised humiliation appears with Juan José Arreola's mortification before the pop singer Thalía on a live broadcast when she accused him of being a "rabo verde" (dirty old man).[1] In an interesting critique of the event, Jorge F. Hernández blamed Arreola for the misunderstanding, because he should never have accepted an appearance on television to talk about soccer (Muñetón Pérez, n.p.). The critic's disapproval of Arreola supports my suggestion that writers who would be "serious" cannot participate lightly in the dignity-stripping media realm that Daniel Howitz describes as "increasingly identical to the public sphere" (143). The conflict plagues the careers of artistic intellectuals who craft spectacular self-images to make it into the spotlight in the first place. Writers who would be public intellectuals must appear on Mexican television, and yet the feminized act that initially catches the public's interest complicates the effort to maintain a respectable image. This problem hints that writers who would be "hard-hitting" (masculinist) public intellectuals must shun publicity-seeking "light" (feminized) opportunities, such as providing color commentary during a soccer broadcast or waxing nostalgic about Mexican urban geography. But, to reject these opportunities is perhaps to forgo meaningful (i.e., highly rated) appearances on television. In fact, a vicious paradox seems to describe the relationship between media and thought: the more successful an intellectual, the more famous he is; with increased fame comes greater manipulation by the media, and thus increased feminization of the intellectual's image, which reduces the intellectual's reputation as respectable. The way to break this cycle would be to find greater respect for the feminine—a surprisingly difficult task. The very mention of Guadalupe Loaeza causes eyes to roll in academic circles. I don't think that this widespread rejection of Loaeza among elite readers has as much to do with her literary skills as it does with the unwritten understanding of what constitutes a "serious" intellectual performance.

Loaeza, faithful to a feminized intellectual performance, routinely accepts nonacademic jobs as a writer and interviewer, and she also cheerfully attends ribbon-cutting ceremonies, invitational breakfasts, and other sorts of promotional events for charities and businesses that end up with coverage in the social section of the newspapers and other forms of style reports. Loaeza continues to over schedule her days with these appearances, probably due to panic at the idea of fading from public attention and missing out on the material payoff. This suspected fear likely reflects the arbitrary nature of her rise to decades of stardom in the first place. Significantly, Guadalupe Loaeza

was born María Guadalupe Loaeza Tovar to a socially elite, but financially declining Mexico City family in 1946, and she was never supposed to be an author, much less a public figure known for her witty observation of Mexican politics, history, and social custom. True to the connotations of the word "witty" (*ocurrente*) as an intrinsic sort of intelligence, humorous ideas simply seem to occur to the largely self-educated thinker. The trilingual sixth sister—of a family of seven girls and one boy—did not finish secondary school. After being dismissed from private Catholic school for her unwelcome attitudes and financial problems, Loaeza began work at age 15 as a receptionist in Mexico City for the fashion house Nina Ricci.[2] Two decades, one husband, and three children later, Loaeza decided to complicate her career as the public relations manager for Nina Ricci by trying her hand at writing. In quick succession, she enrolled in a workshop with Elena Poniatowska, won a writing award, and presented herself at the opposition newspaper *Unomásuno* as a chronicler in potential who could satirize the ways of the Mexican wealthy.

In retelling her audacious decision to ask for work at the paper, Loaeza voices her suspicion that onlooking journalists noted her lack of credentials: "¿Quién diablos era esa señora con boina roja a quien le parecía tan sencillo incorporarse en las planas del periódico, sin ser periodista, ni economista, ni tampoco politólogo, ni nada?" (*Por los de abajo*, 11). (Who the hell was that *señora* with a red beret who thought it was so simple to incorporate herself onto the pages of the newspaper, without being a journalist, or an economist, or a political scientist, or anything?) As Loaeza tells it, her pitch benefited from her attractive looks and her family's social connections, both of which appealed to Miguel Ángel Granados Chapa, the man who would become her editor and the second of three husbands.[3] Her decision to emphasize physical appearance and social status in her autobiographical comments reveal Loaeza's constant attention to a proper *señora* performance that values "decency." On this point, Loaeza differs from the more blatant sexuality projected by precursors Novo, Amor, and Arreola. By stripping her act of excessive sex appeal, Loaeza seems to avoid testing boundaries in the startling modes of the flirtatious writers who broke ground for her and who likely made it possible for us today to see the *señora* performance as more compatible with the tasks of a public thinker. In contrast to her appearance, however, in her writing Loaeza usually breaks with the rules of upper-class decency in two important ways: she spills intimate details about the habits of the rich and she adopts a leftist perspective to criticize social problems in Mexico.

Significantly, when she remembers that momentous day in the early 80s when Granados Chapa phoned her after receiving her first text, Loaeza takes care to include the fact that his enthusiastic call interrupted her soap opera (92). If she is telling the truth, I imagine that the context sticks in her memory because much of Loaeza's most regular calling circle would also have been watching the show, rather than telephoning her. Thus, the interruption may represent a dramatic moment of rupture with Loaeza's insular social class. At any rate, the anecdote of the soap opera anticipates the fact that a sincere taste for melodrama guides Loaeza's views on politics and lends a distinctively feminine flavor to her political analysis. Just as soap characters can turn from conniving schemers to admirable saviors and back again, the politicians in Loaeza's writing fall into unambiguous but potentially reversible categories of hero and villain.[4] This simplification welcomes readers who might not normally take an interest in political events. It also earns many literary critics' disdain. For a representative example of critical rejection, I cite Rafael Lemus's negative review of Loaeza's autobiographical novel *Las yeguas finas* (2003). According to Lemus's hyperbolic dismissal, "Escribe [Loaeza], como tantas otras, una literatura falsamente penetrante, falsamente frívola, falsamente femenina. No es, en rigor, una escritora" (n.p.). (Loaeza writes, like so many other women, a falsely penetrating, falsely frivolous, and falsely feminine literature. She is not, strictly speaking, a writer.) The idea that Loaeza is not a writer and—*and*—writes fallaciously as far as frivolousness and femininity go, designs a game too rigged to invite me to play. However, I will quote more of Lemus's critique because it covers all the bases at once when it comes to disliking Loeaza's work. The critic simultaneously accuses Loaeza of merely reflecting other books and consumer demands ("reflejos de otros libros, ecos a su vez de ciertas demandas comerciales") (reflections of other books, echoes in turn of certain commercial demands) and—*and*—of writing in a vacuum: "Escribe plantada en el vacío, ajena a su clase, a toda tradición literaria, a cualquier visión del mundo" (n.p.). (She writes situated in the void, removed from her class, from all literary tradition, from any vision of the world.) How Loaeza might write unoriginally *and* in ignorance of all literary tradition supplies another conundrum. Such vitriolic criticism of Loeaza's literary efforts demonstrates the ways in which readers can be seen to fall short of Loaeza's work. Of course, Lemus's success as a relatively popular critic in Mexican journalism sets up my suspicion that he in turn looks to the (feminized) irrational to gain a spot in the media in the first place. The femininizing effect of fame

means that Lemus can find public success in artistic contradiction and can employ a spectacularly interesting but irrational argument to reject what he chooses to describe, by implicit contrast to his own work, as dully and illegitimately irrational.

But what, exactly, is Lemus's root problem with Loaeza? I suspect that her standing as an intellectual in the absence of a university degree irritates him. In general, critics disgruntled with Loaeza probably agree with a single petulant question posed by a woman critic for *Excélsior*: "¿Quién le habrá dicho a Loaeza que tiene la capacidad y el conocimiento suficientes para poder opinar sobre cualquier tema?" (Fong Robles). (Who in the world told Loaeza that she has sufficient ability and knowledge to be able to opine on any topic?) The answer for Loaeza probably lies in the authorization granted her by a mass audience. The public that responds to Loaeza's dramatically emotional and emphatically amateur style has helped keep her work in print. After leaving *Unomásuno*, she contributed to the founding of *La Jornada*—or "¡¡¡*La Jornada*!!!" as she puts it—and now she writes three times a week for *Reforma* (*Por los de abajo*, 53). Loaeza's nearly 30 books have achieved phenomenal sales for the Mexican book market with hundreds of thousands of copies sold, and with some titles reaching nearly 30 editions. As predicted from her columns in the newspaper, many of Loaeza's narrative strategies seem lifted not from sanctioned or "high" literary technique, but from the spontaneous conversation of upper-middle-class Mexican women. Loaeza herself identifies her narrative style as conversational: "Soy una platicadora por entregas. O sea que en lugar de platicar, escribo y escribo" (Loaeza, "Confesiones ante un espejo," 23). (I am a serialized chatterer. That is, instead of chatting, I write and write.) Characteristic literary tropes in her work include feigned innocence, unabashed punctuation marks, and word play that mixes Spanish with English and French. A representative example of this intentionally feminized wit appears in Loaeza's hilarious descriptions of grocery shopping from her first collection of newspaper columns, *Las niñas bien* (The good/wealthy girls) (1985). The essay, "Pagas el vino, las cerezas y el gruyere" (You pay the wine, cherries, and gruyère) takes place after the peso devaluation of the early 1980s and assumes the frazzled voice of a once financially comfortable wife who must explain to her suspicious husband the struggle to stretch the food budget:

> Ay, gordo, me deberías de haber visto frente al mostrador de los mariscos, no tienes idea lo que sufrí, para decidirme a comprar entre el camarón gigante a $3,999.00 y el chico de $1,749.00. Después de

> mucho reflexionar, de plano me incliné por el grandote. Primero, porque sentía como que me hacía ojitos y me conquistaron ¿no? Y segundo, porque siendo más grandotes, pensé que nos íbamos a llenar más pronto, por menos (56–57).
>
> Ay, honey, you should have seen me in front of the seafood counter, you have no idea what I went through to make up my mind between buying the jumbo shrimp at $3,999.00 and the small ones at $1,749.00. After reflecting a lot, I finally went for the huge ones. First, because I felt like they were making little eyes at me and they won me over, no? And second, because they are so much larger, I thought that we would fill up faster, with fewer.

If readers smile at the notion of the jumbo shrimp "making eyes" at the housewife, they catch Loaeza's humorous, ground-level approach to dealing with the economic crisis. Many readers view this sort of humor as unsophisticated because it deals with the easily dismissed domestic crisis of consumer choice, rather than the serious problem of poverty or lack of choices.

Clearly, laughing along with Loaeza requires an adequate aesthetic, and only fans of the flirty and frivolous will enjoy her most original writing. As a litmus test of your sense of humor, consider my favorite line from "Miroslava," a text about the eponymous actress who committed suicide in Mexico City in the early 1950s: "Muchas horas después de que Miroslava había muerto, su lipstick seguía intacto" (*Primero las damas*, 126). (Many hours after Miroslava had died, her lipstick was still intact). In criticism published in *La Jornada*, Elena Poniatowksa rejects the aesthetic of "Miroslava" as all research and no heart.[5] The aspects that bother Poniatowska might prove less aggravating for her if she read the short story as a narrative essay. A change in genre can shift the expectations from the desired suspense-building plots and emotive characters typical of short stories and instead embrace the non-plotted fiction of a well-researched narrative. Unlike the psychologically complex beings that would inhabit Poniatowska's ideal short stories, the characters in a narrative essay can illustrate thematic points without needing to mimic human emotional depth. And when speaking of something as selfishly superficial as a movie star's staged suicide, attempted complex sentiment might weaken the admiration for the subject's defense in femininely stylish self-destruction. The Miroslava of Loaeza's text tries to narrow her public interpretation to a single image of unassailable glamour. Ultimately, "Miroslava" narrates not the end of the subject so much as the subject's self-immortalizing ending. Poniatowska's preferred topics of social justice, which require poignantly empathetic readings,

have little to do with Loaeza's aesthetic interest in catching the cold glamour of artistic success in death.

On this topic of genre, I propose that one key to understanding Loaeza's preference for the narrative essay relates to the notion of "public prose" proposed by José Antonio Aguilar Rivera as a mode of separating public intellectuals from mere academics (38). I wonder if, in her role as an accessible intellectual, Loaeza cultivates the narrative essay as a sort of user-friendly genre. The popularity of nonfiction in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries suggests that not every reader has the patience to develop a concern for plotted fictional characters' sentiments, although many readers take an interest in fact-based essays that ignore the contrivance of an overarching plot in favor of the immediate and discrete anecdote. Accordingly, the characters in Loaeza's books on problematic Mexican shopping habits appear almost as personalities in progress; *Compro, luego existo* (I buy, ergo I exist) (1992) and *Debo, luego sufro* (I owe, ergo I suffer) (2000) feature vaguely sketched figures, including the author's alter ego Sofía. Because the books shun a plot and leave the human figures in an anecdotal state, Loaeza allows the audience to engage with an almost "open source" character rather than a completed portrait of a human being. Aguilar Rivera illuminates one mechanism behind the accessible nature of Loaeza's public prose when he cites data suggesting that the "few books Mexicans buy will typically be only half-read" (52). Loaeza's work lends itself to an incomplete reading. She constantly recycles her prose, and thus her longest books contain sections lifted from other books she has written, which makes it possible to read only parts of several of her books and come to a coherent grasp of her views. On top of the repetitions, Loaeza further cultivates accessibility by fragmenting the page with lists, boxes of information, lengthy quotations from other sources, interviews broken up among questions and answers, illustrations and photographs, dictionary-style entries, and short journalistic pieces. Her books also reflect the brightly fluid style of self-help manuals and nonacademic journalism by avoiding page-clogging bibliographic citation.

This habit of unattributed citation occasionally enters the potentially copyright-infringing territory of full-blown plagiarism, a transgression that Guillermo Sheridan has publicized on his blog that is linked to the intellectually legitimizing magazine *Letras libres*—which incidentally also publishes Rafael Lemus's criticism. In an extraordinary coincidence, an interview with Loaeza from 1989 almost predicts this conflict; she picks Sheridan seemingly at random as her feared audience: "Si yo pensara en Guillermo Sheridan, por ejemplo, no escribiría.

No podría hacerlo, porque pensaría a cada línea: esto no le va a gustar a Sheridan, se va a burlar Sheridan" (García Hernández, 33). (If I thought about Guillermo Sheridan, for example, I wouldn't write. I couldn't do it, because I would think at every line: Sheridan isn't going to like this, Sheridan is going to make fun of me.) Loaeza correctly anticipates "qualified" intellectuals' skeptical attitudes toward her work, and hints that she views herself as an illegitimate public thinker if she ponders the matter. Loaeza's ability, up until now at least, to survive accusations of plagiarism corroborates Richard Posner's complaint about the "striking lack of accountability" that marks the performance of thinkers in the media today (382). Of course, it is possible that we do not feel the need to punish Loaeza severely since as a self-taught *señora* she isn't supposed to be able to think for herself in the first place. The issue of unaccountability relates to a scale of public lies. Importantly, Loaeza is not the worst liar out there; for instance, she has never knowingly published against fact. I realize the apologist nature of my thinking here, but after living through the consequences of George W. Bush's mendacious presidency, I gladly make the argument that Loaeza displays a certain "integrity in plagiarism" that in some ways combats anti-intellectual tendencies of the global media.[6] Loaeza never denies scientific or other grounded thought and instead disseminates it, albeit at times without recognizing the source and claiming it as her own.

Because she wasn't supposed to be an intellectual in the first place and because she writes about topics that are either borrowed or lend themselves to frivolity, it is not surprising that Loaeza wrestles with a girlish media label, "la eterna niña bien" (the eternal rich girl). That is, national newspapers tend to nickname Loaeza somewhat derogatorily after her star subject, the well-to-do young women or *las niñas bien* that give the title to her first book. It seems only logical that Loaeza's attempt to develop the persona of a *señora*-who-thinks-in-public ends up occasionally proving stereotypes of feminine stupidity; if she does not conform to these stereotypes at least once in a while, she will no longer be visible as a *señora*. Now in her mid-sixties, Loaeza comes to terms with her reputation as privileged and immature female by describing herself as an "ex niña bien" (former good/rich girl), a label that forms part of the subtitle, in fact, of her book about her failed bid for public office during the elections of July 2008.[7] When I chatted in May 2011 with the campaign manager, Mary Vázquez Guizar, about an impressively answered questionnaire on history related to Mexico City printed in *¿Quién?* for Loaeza's 2008 campaign, Vázquez explained the difference between

Gabriela Cuevas, the winner of the election, and Loaeza. In paraphrased translation, the political insider commented, "Gaby knows an answer about architecture in Mexico City because she read it in a book. Guadalupe knows the answer because she heard the architect talk at a dinner party." Perhaps predictably, many literary critics and political commentators reject this chatty manner of gaining intellectual authority. Certainly, this question of legitimacy describes the conflicting résumés held by Loaeza and her four-years-younger academic sister, Soledad ("Marisol") Loaeza.

The two sisters have not been on speaking terms for years, even though they both live in Mexico City. I suspect that the tension has something to do with rivalry sparked by their competitive struggles for intellectual authority. Soledad went to the trouble of backing her political writing with a doctorate from France, no less, and she works as a research professor at the prestigious Center for International Studies at the Colegio de México. Yet, compared to Guadalupe's public popularity, Soledad labors in the shadows. Possibly, Soledad's thoughtful, well-researched, properly documented, and poorly selling texts form a parallel with my present academic readers' careers. You poor Soledades. If you look up the academic Loaeza sister on YouTube, you will see a possibly familiar, undeniably soulless display of academic speak. Soledad talks stiffly, dresses stiffly, smiles stiffly, and gives a stiff message so correctly expressed that after the first few pronouncements, the viewer watches the time counter on the video frame. A simple comparison among clips on YouTube shows that Guadalupe's success does not stem from being better looking or smarter than Soledad, but from wielding greater charisma. In her warm style as a permanently amateur interviewer, Guadalupe does not lecture to the camera; she comes alive and emotes for it. The effect of Guadalupe's dazzling charm is even more powerful in person—but don't take my seduced word for it. Here is how Elena Poniatowska describes the magnetism wielded by her former workshop pupil: "La 'chispa' de Lupita no la tiene nadie. Su simpatía ejerce un poder hipnótico en sus interlocutores. Uno suplica que no deje de hablar, de gesticular, de hacer visajes mientras pasa la mano derecha por su cabello rubio" (Poniatowska, "Guadalupe [. . .] Tercera Parte," 34). (No one has Lupita's [Loaeza's] "spark." Her affability works a hypnotic power over her interlocutors. We beg that she not stop talking, gesturing, grimacing while she runs her right hand through her blond hair.) Lest the reader believe that the presence of blond hair responds to simple racist rhetoric, I hasten to point out that Poniatowska is the natural blond. In fact, so was Soledad Loaeza as a child. By contrast, photos of Guadalupe in childhood show that

she was actually a decided brunette—a detail that probably no one who watches her blonded public performance in the 80s and beyond would guess. The lesser respect paid to Guadalupe likely responds to Guadalupe's determination to take blond to its unnatural limits by exceeding what Poniatowska and Soledad Loeaza allow themselves in their more demur self-performance. In May 2011, I observed this femme exaggeration firsthand over several days while Loaeza filmed interviews for one of her many short-lived interview series on Mexican television. For her assorted appearances and recordings, Guadalupe wore a blond bobbed hairdo, red nails and red lipstick, fake eyelashes, big jewelry, high heels, flowing scarves, and generous cleavage. During my visit, she described how she has worked hard to leave behind the diminutive nickname "Lupita" used in the previous quotation by Poniatowska—that is, "Elenita" Poniatowksa, as some journalists call her. Bucking that ultimately disrespectful public convention and convincing others to address her as "Guadalupe" marks a hard-earned increase in status.

But there is no need to exaggerate the disparity between real and fake blonds, or among Poniatowska and Soledad Loaeza on the one hand, and Guadalupe Loaeza on the other. The invention of strictly disparate categories for the women intellectuals' public images contributes to false isolation of the most femme performances. Generally speaking, women writers in Mexico are more similar than different in large part because they come from comparable backgrounds and face analogous challenges in the effort to attain critical respect. For example, note Loaeza's recollections of all that she and Soledad shared in girlhood: "nuestra recámara, amigos, [. . .] pretendientes, monjas, lecturas, reseñas en el cine Roble, enojos y excentricidades de mi madre y los juegos olímpicos de 1968, ambas fuimos edecanes" (*Mujeres maravillosas*, 27–28). (Our bedroom, friends, [. . .] suitors, nuns, readings, reviews in the Roble theater, my mother's attacks and eccentricities and the Olympic games of 1968, we were both hostess-models.) Yes, you read that last detail correctly. Both girls spent time in late 1968 proudly strutting their stuff during Mexico's politically troubled Olympics as *edecanes,* a sort of sexist cross between a model valued for her looks and a more or less articulate presenter of a product, which in this case was Mexico for tourists. Soledad has managed to overcome this disqualification to serious intellectual status, perhaps by virtue of her foreign graduate studies. By contrast to Soledad's silence, Guadalupe reminisces proudly about her Olympic moment as a good-looking Mexican model, and she did not march in a political protest until she had already become a middle-aged writer.

Herrera's concluding remarks in a negative review of *Mujeres maravillosas* (1997) deliver a stern warning to Loaeza, supposedly drawn from Freud: "Para publicar se necesita pudor" (14). (To publish, one needs modesty.) Aside from the hypocrisy inherent in the fact that Freud was not particularly modest, this advice seems absurd because a truly self-effacing writer would lapse into silence. Fortunately, modesty is what Guadalupe Loaeza habitually sets aside in order to continue the lineage of published femme thinkers. Rather than modesty, Loaeza flaunts a kind of self-authorized pride that supports a will to doubled curiosity: as a femme thinker she is a curious creature to others and she delights at performing curiosity by, among other tactics, posing endless questions. This habit gains an audience at the cost of a more serious reputation. But the communal character of questions, as opposed to the more individual or copyrightable nature of answers, fits Loaeza's limitations as a self-taught intellectual. For fellow writer and activist Sabina Berman, Loaeza's main drawback is her lack of a proposed alternative, which causes her indignation at the status quo to stall in irony (5). In the end, Loaeza does not aim to make sense for her public so much as she encourages audience members to think for themselves through indignant questioning of Mexico's contradictions and injustices. If Loaeza were to volunteer answers instead of ironical questions, she would distract from that very goal. Furthermore, people wouldn't listen to her.

In point of the fact that when Loaeza does venture an answer, few listen to it, I cite the campaign materials from 2008. Loaeza turned in the first registered ideas in response to a call for citizens' political proposals put out by the Sistema de Obervación por la Seguridad Ciudadana, A.C. (SOS) (System of Observation for Citizen Safety). I possess an official stamped copy of Loaeza's six suggestions, thanks to campaign manager Vázquez Guizar's archival generosity, and I find that the most significant proposal asks for a law that would allow citizens to participate in politics without the necessity of having a political party to back them. A second important proposition asks that politicians in Mexico City be eligible for one period of reelection so that elected officials may work with one another in a more coordinated manner. These unrealized and poorly disseminated plans have had little or no effect on the political landscape and are the exception in Loaeza's questioning performance as an intellectual. Her "fun" questions find more of an audience than her "serious" answers.

An example of Loaeza's questioning style appears in the two-volume *Manual de la gente bien* (1995, 1996), where she rewrites the famed *Manual de Carreño*, the late nineteenth-century guide to

manners. The debate over the word "provecho," a term sometimes spoken in Mexico before mealtimes in the tradition of "bon appétit," supplied the initial inspiration for the guide to manners (Poniatowska, "Guadalupe [. . .] Primera Parte," 35). Yet, this foundational controversy does not receive definitive treatment in the guidebook, and after reviewing the sides of the argument, Loaeza leaves it to the reader to decide the propriety of wishing others "provecho" before a meal. The same DIY (decide it yourself) approach characterizes her handling of the character Sofía, who gives uncritical voice to what Loaeza haplessly thinks; as the author explains in an article for *¡Siempre!*: "Debo decir que [Sofía] es un poco mi consciencia, mi otro yo. En su boca pongo todo lo que yo no quiero decir, pero que sí pienso. [. . .] Cuando escribo sobre ella es una forma de exorcizar todo lo que no me gusta de mi personalidad" ("Confesiones ante un espejo," 23). (I should say that she [Sofía] is a bit of my conscience, my other "I." In her mouth I put everything that I do not want to say, but that I do think. [. . .] When I write about her it is a way to exorcize everything that I don't like about my personality.) One characteristic that Loaeza does not want to confess but that Sofía easily admits is racism. That Sofía is racist surfaces upon her return to Mexico from a shopping binge in the United States, when she suffers the "usual" culture shock: "'La verdad es que son feos los mexicanos. Ya no me acordaba de que fueran tan morenos, ¡qué horror!', se dijo" (*Compro, luego existo*, 48). ("The truth is that Mexicans are ugly. I didn't remember that they were so brown. How awful!" she said to herself.) This insider approach to racism allows the audience to either identify with, or raise an alienated eyebrow at, the prejudice and then to arrive at an independent rejection of it. To conquer a personal prejudice, a bigot must first admit to the bias, and Loaeza manages to own up indirectly to the hateful racism that other wealthy Mexicans share but publicly deny. Importantly, Loaeza's readers must finish for themselves the critique of racism set up by Sofía's stupidity. Given the traditional social context for Mexican readers of authoritarian politicians who rarely admit the racist social structure that underlies the official rhetoric, this break from thought commandments may draw an audience eager for greater political participation.

The plucky but error-stricken protagonist Sofía, in the style of her creator, inevitably participates in the customs that she critiques. This hypocrisy reflects the double sense of *lo comprometido*: Sofía's act as a wealthy femme leftist is at once committed and compromised. For instance, Sofía, like Loaeza, cheerfully fails at self-improvement with endless (ergo unsuccessful) diets and eternally renewed resolutions

to stop shopping.[8] Although Sofía and Loaeza amuse and exasperate by failing to improve on an individual level, they nevertheless expect change to occur on a national scale. In evidence of a decidedly romantic commitment to political change, Sofía finds refreshing escapism in the gossip magazines like *¡Hola!*, of the famous title *Confieso que he leído… ¡Hola!* (2006) (I confess that I have read… *¡Hola!*), and the alter ego reads the newspaper as a reality trip that almost always ends in furious disbelief (*Las obsesiones de Sofía*, [1999]). While some may view Sofía and Loaeza's overt inconsistencies as hypocritical, I see the obvious (i.e. not closeted) incongruence as a way of bringing shaming social problems to the discussible surface. Possibly, through the flexible help-yourself social definitions and unplotted characters like Sofía, Loaeza avoids the downfall of the contemporary intellectual as Aguilar Rivera fears it. Contrary to the alleged trend in specialization, Loaeza has not shrunk the role of intellectual to a narrow academic focus.

In fact, an interview from 2010 quotes Loaeza as wanting to be remembered in vague terms as a "communicologist of her time" ("comunicóloga de su tiempo") (Hernández, 31). The downside of versatility is that Loaeza acts with relative unaccountability, and I wonder if instead of "communicologist" the term "pop intellectual" might suit her better. Unfortunately, the pressure of deadlines on the media star means that even some of Loaeza's questions are half-baked, over and above her ghost-written or plagiarized answers. Fortunately for the sake of my analysis, Loaeza's preferred rhetoric of the question welcomes incongruence. The self-aware spirit of her inconsistencies strengthens Loaeza's appealing sincerity and increases the political relevance of her wit. Not surprisingly, given her public confession of flaws through Sofía and other, more direct autobiographical statements, Loaeza implicitly dismisses a possibly transcendental value inherent in the act of writing. It seems that for Loaeza, the written word serves to transmit ideas and to justify an extratextual performance of her media image. However, writing does not seem to serve as a supreme end in itself for her. This value suggests one likely reason why Loaeza has not bothered to imitate learned writers' fiction styles. This lack of pretension makes Loaeza an easy voice. Her freedom from pragmatic answers and solutions returns me to the matter of her popularity in a country that does not read much. Loaeza becomes "fun" and an author of texts ripe for casual consumption because she frames many social and political problems in terms of melodramatic conflict, and because she rarely bothers to invent a (boring) happy ending. This is not to say that she is satisfied with the approach.

As a lip-synching performer of public intellectuality, Loaeza feels guilty about her own habits and keeps tabs on the most appealing critiques issued by others, which only makes her that much more engaging and even useful for the general public. It bears emphasizing that Loaeza is not the shining example, but the flaming contradiction, and she consistently admits it. An interview published in 1994 has her respond to the one-word question of whether she is "¿Intelectual?" with a one-word denial: "Cero" (Zero) (J. Ortiz). She goes on to clarify "No tengo disciplina intelectual. [. . .] Soy la Gloria Trevi de las periodistas" (n.p.). (I do not have intellectual discipline. [. . .] I am the [pop star] Gloria Trevi of women newspaper reporters.) Contradictorily, in another interview Loaeza shrinks from an imagined reputation as "la Gloria Trevi de las letras" (the literary Gloria Trevi) (Poniatowska, "Guadalupe [. . .] Segunda Parte," 34). Although more substantially clothed than Trevi, Loaeza also rebels against mother's rules, a familiar feminism that does not end up proposing a new way so much as it satirizes the old one. Loaeza, perhaps predictably, vacillates as a labeled feminist. A conversation published in 1989 with Arturo García Hernández reports Loaeza denying a personal feminism: "No, yo no me considero feminista" (No, I do not consider myself to be feminist.) (33). Nearly ten years later, during an unpublished interview with me in October 2008, Loaza gave a wavering answer to the same question that ultimately favored the label: "Sí, sí soy feminista." (Yes, yes I'm feminist.) In May 2011, she gave me another entertaining philosophical puzzle by defining her religious orientation as an atheist believer in the Virgin Guadalupe, which incidentally gives an ambivalent vote of confidence for her namesake ("Soy guadalupana atea").

Faithful to her flashy paradoxes as atheist believer in the supreme Mexican Catholic diva, Loaeza contradictorily defends both her love for shopping in a grossly inequitable capitalist society and leftist ideals for social justice. Official sources face a challenge when trying to co-opt Loaeza's message precisely due to her critical contradictions as an embodied femme thinker. I wonder if this unmanageability explains some of Loaeza's failure to attain significant party backing in the recent elections. Even though *Compro, luego existo* and *Debo, luego sufro* owe their existence to the Federal Consumer Protection Agency, la Procuraduría Federal del Consumidor (Profeco), Loaeza challenges the official call for fiscal responsibility that she helped to articulate, and continues to shop compulsively (*Debo, luego sufro*, 341). I cannot resist citing Loaeza's telling but nonsensical refusal to give up the credit card, as recognized in the acknowledgments of

Compro, luego existo when she thanks Casa Nina Ricci for teaching her to distinguish between "comprar y comprar" (buying and buying) (15). I leave it to the reader's sensibility to determine whether Loaeza has a valid point. Regardless of the interpretation of this paradox, the quirky statement exemplifies Loaeza's habitual technique of amusing absurdity.

Loaeza's act is most creative in these moments of passionate incongruence, which support her intellectual act as a media attraction. For example, she has adapted the upscale Palacio de Hierro department store slogan to cheer on the indigenous rebellion in Chiapas during the mid-1990s. From having bought into the famous advertising campaign and designed herself as "totalmente Palacio" (totally Palacio), she describes herself as turning "totalmente Chiapas" (totally Chiapas) (*Por los de abajo*, 295). This unexpected gesture of using an advertising slogan to characterize a civil war suggests the similarity of the consumerist ideals and the Chiapan movement for Loaeza; being totally in style relates to political taste. Since the consumer mentality fits with a significant portion of the media consuming public, Loaeza's femme fan base will probably take greater delight in chicly posing as "Totally Chiapas" than in declaring with rigid masculinity, "Todos somos Marcos." (We are all Marcos). This attention to individuality and shopping habits reflects a major current in the contemporary political spirit. As Bruce Robbins has pointed out, collective social identities today form around not so much the productive ideal of "Workers of the world unite," but a consumer call for shoppers to unite (39). Just as a savvy shopper wants a (feel) good transaction, so a savvy voter searches for the right (looking) candidate. In the long run, something does not quite work with this arrangement. Consumers might unite in Loaeza's implicit rallying cry to style themselves as leftist, but due to the individualistic and even unsustainable nature of the proposal, the readers can hardly react as an articulated unit. This individualistic disarticulation helps to provoke Loaeza's criticized lack of concrete answers. Her readers may value style over substance—or perhaps more accurately, they value style *as* substance. This obsession with design fails to supply a stable political platform for collective action beyond the marketplace. Unfortunately for Loaeza's political ambitions, the questions that fuel her literary appeal also constitute her limitation. Her methods prevent her from adhering to any one institution.

Not all of Loaeza's ineffectiveness when it comes to coordinating social change is the fault of her intellectual and performative contradictions, however. As I have tried to clarify, another serious shortcoming

for Loaeza's political efficacy has to do with society's trivializing response to wealthy Mexican women's political protest. Loaeza reviews this problem somewhat impersonally in *Los de arriba* (The people on top) (2002), when she recalls twenty-first-century attempts at protest among the *señoras* who group at Rosario Castellanos Park in Mexico City only to attract smirking press coverage:

> Las mujeres "popis" del parque Rosario Castellanos fueron víctimas de un juicio terrible por parte de los medios de comunicación. Se burlaron de ellas. No recibieron el menor crédito. Las sentían falsas, ignorantes e incluso farsantes. Para colmo, pensaban que estas señoras eran incapaces de pensar por sí solas. [. . .] "Mala onda, dicen los popis, Las Lomas contra los Pinos," se leía en la primera plana del *Ovaciones*. "Represión *light* contra los vecinos de colonias residenciales," se leía en *La Jornada*. "Los ricos también lloran," comentó, con una sonrisita tendenciosa Javier Alatorre en el noticiario de Televisión Azteca al presentar el reportaje de la marcha. (*Manual de la Gente Bien, II*, 276–77).
>
> The preppy women of Rosario Castellanos Park were victims of a terrible trial on the part of the media. They were laughed at. They were not given the least credit. They were perceived as fake, ignorant, and even liars. To top it off, these *señoras* were seen as incapable of thinking for themselves. [. . .] "Bad Vibes, Say the Preppies, Las Lomas [the ritzy neighborhood] against Los Pinos [the Presidential residence]," read the headline of *Ovaciones*. "Repression *Lite* Against the Neighbors of Residential Zones," read *La Jornada*. "The rich cry too," Javier Alatorre commented, with a biased little smile on the newscast of Televisión Azteca when presenting the report on the protest.

Loaeza regrets that the "alleged women citizens" ["estas supuestas ciudadanas"] only managed to provoke hilarity among the foreign correspondents and national reporters. Here, I adapt Gayatri Spivak's famous question, "Can the subaltern speak?" for the purposes of analyzing the "amateur" femme thinker: "Can wealthy women critique?" If we are accustomed to giving the poor a voice in the media (but wait a minute, wasn't *that* Spivak's critique? That we don't?), then how do rich *señoras* fail to assume the agency that is supposed to be inherent to their privileged social station? Who can speak authoritatively as intellectuals in the media besides the politicians, the police, and the PhDs? Or rather, whom can we hear?

This question is no joke, despite the seeming offense to Spivak's original concern with the disenfranchised who battle for agency under racist and classist repression. Perhaps unexpectedly to those critics who focus on the problems of representation for a majority

of the population, a minority citizenship problem appears to exist among would-be liberal wealthy women living in sexist circumstances. George Yúdice has pointed out that in one sense agency is a "false concept" because just like language, power is never wholly one's own (668). According to Yúdice's proposals, Loaeza and other women would need to be granted agency in the media in order for them to exercise a Right to leftist political critique. Yet, the media does not seem to have much respect for rich women's political protests. This problem may have something to do with the framework in which entitled feminine voices usually appear. Entertainment, social, and style sections of the media feature wealthy women when the news is "good," but these same sections do not often cover feminine acts if they attempt to emit a "serious" (ergo "bad") message. Given the potential for wealthy women like Loaeza to effect positive political change, this mirthful media attitude toward them indicates an unsettling bias.

This media limitation did not always affect wealthy women's ability to be taken seriously as political and intellectual players. In an earlier, less democratic age in Europe some wealthy women's political decisions gained respect as matters of national policy and not insanely immodest attempts to "play serious," because the women held noble titles, such as "queen." In my final observation for this article, I suggest that the femme power granted by a noble title explains the curious and otherwise self-defeating tendency among feminized pioneers in the Mexican media to turn nostalgic. Loaeza has in common with Amor, Novo, Arreola, and even López Velarde and Nervo, the tendency to use her literature to cast an evocative glance back to times when some admirable members of society were also nobles. This look back reminds me of Peggy Phelan's discussion of Michael Jackson's moonwalk as an otherworldly logic "in which one advances by moving backward" (944). By playing the divo, Michael Jackson gave a consummate performance that blurred the artist with his art and proposed the culmination of a class act. I offer Loaeza's psychological dependence on shoulder pads as an equivalent to Jackson's eccentricities as the "King of Pop." As is evident from a smiling admission made to me by her personal assistant and from narrative attributed to Sofía, Loaeza requires that shoulder pads be sewn into every item of her clothing that could use it, including her nightgowns. The padding lends a sort of strength in costume that reminds me of the force granted in other times by a crown, and it is perhaps not utterly exaggerated to note the resemblance among the words "hombreras" (shoulder pads), "hombro" (shoulder), "hombre"

(man), and "hombría" (manliness). Alongside these connotations of fake masculinity imparted by the shoulder pads, however, it is clear that Loaeza loves them for at least one other motive: they add visual structure that slims the waist.

In sum, Loaeza's feminized performance makes her more salient in the media, but that same performance subtracts from her intellectual credibility. Loaeza's blonded consumer act tries to communicate a "classy," even royal air in the midst of an argument for leftist democratic values, and possibly this contradiction means to establish her credibility by falsely "remembering" an innate right to rule. The notion of return to authority by intellectuals who stake a claim to nobility is as troublesome to me as the tendency for intellectuals who become successful media stars to suffer a decline in the public's estimation of their rational thinking abilities. To this end, I note that while contemporary Mexican journalists born in the early 1960s, such as Lydia Cacho, Denise Dresser, or Carmen Aristegui, might seem more "serious" as public intellectuals, they are standing on Loaeza's neurotic shoulder pads. When inventing how to be a woman public intellectual in an act that ultimately benefited the generation born after her, Loaeza used a conservative touch to restrain the sexuality of her predecessors while still cultivating a liberal blond ambition. I know of another Madonna, the one with the sometimes royal British accent, who might be impressed.

Notes

1. All translations are mine.
2. In fact, the infamous compulsive shopper was initially paid in clothes: "Son ellos que me hicieron adicta," Loaeza explained in a personal interview in May 2011. (They made me an addict.)
3. Loeaza explains, "Iba guapísima. Yo entonces era delegada de la casa Nina Ricci. Lo que le interesó mucho [a Granados Chapa] es que era pariente de [expresidente] López Portillo, por el lado de mi mamá" (V. Ortiz, 91). (I went in gorgeous. Back then I was a delegate for the Nina Ricci fashion house. What interested him [Granados Chapa] a lot was that I was a relative of [expresident] López Portillo, on my mother's side.)
4. After losing her own election for federal political representative for a section of Mexico City in 2008, Loaeza seems to have lost her shine for Andrés Manual López Obrador, just as previously Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas fell from political perfection for her when she began to favor AMLO.
5. Poniatowska writes, "Bien documentado, sacado de la Hemeroteca, la investigación es acuciosa, pero el '*feeling*' brilla por su ausencia,

ninguna introspección, la escritura plana resulta enumerativa. Falta imaginación literaria" ("Tú tienes la culpa [. . .]: Tercera partes," 27) (Well-documented, extracted from the Journalism Archive, the research is thorough, but "feeling" shines by its absence, no introspection, the flat writing is enumerative. It lacks literary imagination.)

6. Recall Susan Jacoby's dismay that George W. Bush's support for the teaching of intelligent design failed to stir major critique: "But no one pointed out how truly extraordinary it was that any American president would place himself in direct opposition to contemporary scientific thinking" (28).
7. Loaeza's failed political campaign for federal representative labeled her the "ciudadana de bien" (good citizen).
8. A list of confessed faults from *Debo, luego sufro* has the aging Sofía take stock of her personal defects: "Tengo varices. Soy muy gastadora. Ya no tengo cintura. [. . .] Ronco por las noches. No tengo seguro de vida. No soy deportista. Tengo arrugas. No puedo dormir sin mis hombreras. Soy muy desorganizada . . . Pero mi peor defecto es mi ego. ¡Es enorme! [. . .] Aunque ya estoy madurita, no soy una persona madura. Sigo siendo la típica niña-mujer. Soy muy unilateral. Criticona. Chismosa. Frívola. Materialista. Ignorante. No sé cuántos ríos hay en la república. No me sé de memoria todas las estrofas del himno nacional. No sé cocinar. No sé quién es Caravaggio" (55). (I have varicose veins. I spend too much. I no longer have a waist. [. . .] I snore at night. I don't have life insurance. I am not athletic. I have wrinkles. I can't sleep without my shoulder pads. I am very disorganized . . . But my worst defect is my ego. It's huge! [. . .] Although I am getting up there, I am not a mature person. I continue to be the typical girl-woman. I am unilateral. Overly critical. Gossipy. Frivolous. Materialistic. Ignorant. I don't know how many rivers the republic has. I don't know by heart all the stanzas of the national anthem. I don't know how to cook. I don't know who Caravaggio is.)

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