

*Published by the*  
UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA PRESS

# HISPANIC REVIEW

WINTER 2022  
*(Volume 90.1)*

LÓPEZ-GAY, PATRICIA. *Ficciones de verdad: archivo y narrativas de vida*. Iberoamericana Vervuert, 2020. 244 pp.

Patricia López-Gay's first book, *Ficciones de verdad*, represents an insightful contribution to the field of Peninsular Studies. The manuscript is a renewed meditation on the condition of the archive, bringing uncommon theoretical robustness and an innovative perspective. The author establishes an interdisciplinary dialogue with areas other than literature, such as photography, graphic arts, and performance, which provides a reliable conceptual apparatus around a trope: *autoficción*. This trope, which offers an alternative to the biographical genre within the world of nonfiction literature, can be of huge benefit in future discussions of Hispanism and current expressions of literature. Simultaneously, the work contributes a necessary revision of the Spanish democratic period through the analysis of different formal, thematic, and historical literary figures from the 1970s until today. López-Gay opts for the contribution of four master voices—Jorge Semprún, Javier Marías, Enrique Vila-Matas, and Marta Sanz—to depict the role of “narrativas de verdad.”

*Ficciones de verdad* is not a traditional or average academic book. It suggests studying new literary poetics, and it does so with a personal style of writing. Its structure is not homogeneous, which may imply certain methodological drawbacks. Nevertheless, the particular strength of the book is in its formal asymmetry and conceptual depth. Throughout the first two sections, “Umbral de entrada” and “Panorámica: fiebre de archivo y autoficción,” the text proposes the “giro autoficcional” as a review of the “archive fever” theorized in the 90s by French critical theory and centered on personal archives in the form of pictures, maps, trips, memories, and bodies. López-Gay seems especially comfortable with the creative freedom that allows her to articulate the first theoretical block before the monographic case studies. Her wide range of references, from Cervantes to Baudelaire to Foucault, from premodern photography to contemporary Spanish photographer

Fontcuberta, ensures the audience's enjoyment in reading the book. An example of this is the theory-based chapter "Nuevas y viejas tecnologías del yo," in which López-Gay appropriates Foucauldian terminology to describe the current digital status of the biographical genre through the phenomenon of *lifelogging*. This is proposed by the author as a narcissistic return to Foucault's Ancient Greek *cuidados de sí* that today behaves as a "tecnología del yo cuantificado" (141). It is presented as antagonistic to the autofiction form of "epistemología del yo-cuerpo" (142), not measurable and part of a multiplicity that "selecciona, cataloga y analiza trazas de vida [de una manera] no necesariamente lineal" (139).

The second part of the book, which includes the analysis of the *autoficción* writing of the four targeted writers, is presented as an (unconscious?) historical loop dynamic. Although the author divides the block between a first preliminary focus on the figure of Semprún and a central section on the studies of Marías, Vila-Matas and Sanz, the final chapter on Sanz resonates with the preliminary one on Semprún. Even with multiple differences between them, a common thread unites them: political drive. Thus, once we have read the book, we witness a subtle intuition: the literary excellence of Marías and Vila-Matas is devoid of political motivation to the extent that both are leading figures in the period of democratic stability and depoliticization. The return of the political that Sanz represents, according to the author, can be read as the end of the democratic normality that was questioned at the time by the exemplary antiauthoritarianism in Semprún. Starting from the books *Autobiografía de Federico Sánchez*, *Federico Sánchez se dedica de ustedes* and the posthumous *Ejercicios de supervivencia*, López-Gay proposes Semprún's autobiographical work as a precedent of autofiction insofar as it is the result of an experience of "impotencia política" (112) which is capable, nevertheless, of generating an archive "desde el archivo" (113). The author situates the relevance of Semprún's aesthetic proposal of an uprising of "lo político" over "lo politizado" as the result of an honest dialogue between the personal and the collective—in her case, denouncing the barbarism of both Stalinism and Francoism.

The chapters dedicated to Marías and Vila-Matas have the greatest conceptual depth. While the figure of Marías is analyzed based on works such as *Negra espalda del tiempo*, as well as his blog and website, in the case of Vila-Matas, several pieces are studied (*Dietario voluble* and *Cabinet d'amateur; una novela oblicua*) in addition to his Twitter account and website. Vila-Matas

is presented as the epitome of a postmaterial “archivo de citas” (166), which updates the Benjaminian suitcase and arcades to bring them to the field of contemporary digital collage that authors such as Fontcuberta and Goldsmith have already worked on: from reproduction to postproduction. Less contemporary, Marías’s work is defined as a “negativo o revés de archivo,” a narrative laboratory that flees from the “saber positivista” of traditional biographical writing and that questions “huellas por momentos enigmáticas” (153–54). Autofiction in Marías is like a “proceso de revelado” (160) in which the formal becomes the essential.

Meanwhile, Sanz’s writing of autofiction is defined as “autotatuaje.” Based on Sanz’s works *La lección de anatomía* and *Clavícula*, López-Gay identifies the body as the subject on which experience falls and on which is sculpted a register which is as personal and as it is collective. The body, in Sanz’s work, is linked to two factors: being a woman and being a powerful voice of the decade of the greatest social crisis in democracy. But what is specific about her work? It is probably the displacement, which López-Gay perfectly captures, of an “ímpetu apertural del yo al nosotros” (194)—that is, from the generation of Marías and Vila-Matas to Sanz’s generation. López-Gay identifies the author’s “vulnerabilidad compartida” as a trope which defines a generation and an abject aesthetics as the characteristic of a literature which seeks to disrupt “el sistema de identidades y el orden establecido” (197). The body, in Sanz, becomes a situated archive, made from fragments of life: “un mundo personal-compartido que la crisis ha dejado en ruinas” (199).

The book closes with the chapter “Autoficción y archivo: un deseo incontenible de bios.” By way of an epilogue, and with some influence from Sanz’s analysis, López-Gay characterizes autofiction as the expression of a collective archive based on networks of “huellas inciertas” (206). Aside from the notion of the more classical archive, which the author associates with photography and her “intento metódico de emular lo real en detalle” (207), these life narratives reject the schematization of the portrait and also the autobiographical “evidence of me” (McKemmish).<sup>1</sup> By identifying this literature as the impulse of *bios*, “vida que contiene y desborda al yo” (207), López-Gay dismantles the traditional antagonistic relationship between fiction and

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1. McKemmish, Sue. “Evidence of Me . . . in a Digital World.” *I, Digital: Personal Collections in the Digital Era*, edited by Christopher A. Lee et al., Society of American Archivists, 2011, pp. 115–48.

reality to focus on another binary for the current historical moment: *fragmentariedad* (“la interconexión de fragmentos”) as opposed to a certain *totalidad* (“totalización” or “archivo total” [208]) of an already obsolete modernity.

In short, what López-Gay presents to us is a form of narrative which reflects what Raymond Williams defined as “structure of *feeling*” of a specific time—the current one—which “se desea elástico, expansible” (López-Gay 209) and in which literature expresses the desire for “resistencia fisiológica a la muerte” (213), perhaps hardly visible in Marías and Vila-Matas. For times of political and social exceptionality based on an agonistic feeling of existence, López-Gay’s *narrativas de vida* are an accurate and valuable diagnostic tool of a certain past and the present, as well as a compass for the future.

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