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Ficciones de verdad: archivo y narrativas de vida por
Patricia López-Gay (review)

Rolando Pérez

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España franquista con Guinea Ecuatorial en la novela *Annobón* (2017), de Luis Leante, y proponer que existe un paralelismo entre la represión de la colonia y la de la primera postguerra.

En definitiva, Con el franquismo en el retrovisor constituye una obra relevante para indagar en las múltiples formas en las que la dictadura de Franco se halla todavía presente y viva en la España contemporánea. La diversidad de representaciones culturales analizadas en el libro manifiesta la realidad poliédrica de la memoria y la necesidad de continuar ahondando en la recuperación y afloración del pasado silenciado y/u olvidado.

Iker González-Allende
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Ficciones de verdad: archivo y narrativas de vida

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Por Patricia López-Gay

At the end of the 19th century José Martí wrote in the “Prologue to Juan Antonio Pérez Bonalde’s *Poem of Niagara*,” that the poets of his day had ceased to write national epics like Homer’s *Iliad*, Virgil’s *Aeneid*, *The Poem of the Cid*, or Tasso’s *Jerusalem Delivered*. The newspaper, a product of the fast pace of modernity, had displace works like Dante’s *Divine Comedy* with the newspaper. Instead of writing on issues that affected society at large, argued Martí, contemporary poets wrote on the trivialities of their everyday lives. This was said by a politically engaged revolutionary who objected to what he interpreted to be modernity’s narcissism. Living during the first decades of the age of photography, for Martí the Archive was

primordially national and historical. The political sovereignty of the emerging Latin American nations needed to forge their own archives, but neither the “vain villager” nor the Francophile “modernista” poet could care less.

Now, though Martí plays no role at all in Patricia López Gay’s *Ficciones de verdad*, a book that concentrates on the question of auto-fiction in relation to the Archive, I mention it because I believe it helps us to understand the most traditional and *conservative* notion of the Archive. To that end López-Gay begins her book with a description and a reference to Catalan visual artist, Montserrat Soto’s 2007 archive exhibition at Barcelona’s Museum of Modern Art, *Archivo de archivos (1998-2006)*. López-Gay explains that the exhibition’s archive of archives included mementos, obituaries, source documents, biological memory, universal memory, and Internet digital/visual memory (p. 18). This is a well-chosen place from which to begin her study, for *Montserrat’s Archivo de archivos* nearly covers all the forms of archives treated in the book. Informing her theoretical framework, she tells us, is Derrida’s notion of the archive as elucidated in the seminal *Mal d’Archive: une impression freudienne* (1995). Interestingly, as she points out, the title of Derrida’s book was rendered into English as *Archive Fever* (1995—fever understood as the body’s physiological response to an infection, and clearly, and hence the “mal” (or malady) of the original French title. However, one possible problem with the English translation is that “fever” can also be understood as something positive: a metaphorical expression of enthusiasm, as in “dance fever.” And here one may recall the famous late 1970’s movie about disco dancing, *Saturday Night Fever*. I say this is a possible problem, because

it may not be a problem at all, especially if one considers for a moment, Derrida's "pharmakon" in "Plato's Pharmacy," where the *pharmakon* was both a remedy and a poison. Thought in this manner, fever could also be seen a killer as well as curative: for while an excessively high fever may kill, a low grade fever may be indicative of the body's capacity to "fight" an infection. This would leave Derrida's notion of the archive as undecidable as the question of writing vis-à-vis the metaphysics of presence. The archive, says our author, can preserve as well as discard (p. 20). The malady alluded to in Derrida's "mal" would then be constitutive of the ontological imperative to preserve rather than to acknowledge the memory/forgetfulness difference. Are we witnessing today, perhaps, the definitive change from the Cartesian "I think, therefore I am" to "I archive, therefore I am?" provocatively asks López-Gay. This last reformulation of Cartesian ontology, derived from Leonor Arfuch's *Memory and Autobiography: Explorations as the Limits* (2020), is an apt description of the contemporary belief that one "does not exist" unless one participates in some kind of social network like *Facebook* or *Instagram* (22). Moreover, in the 21st century, to be, as Bishop Berkeley put it, is to be perceived (*esse est percipi*). Not by God, of course, but rather by everyone in the universe of the Internet. And yet, according to López-Gay, this is only part of the problematic. The remainder concerns the question of truth, and it impacts on the way in which an artist or an author is perceived. Doubtlessly this brings us to the topic of auto-fiction, and the title of the monograph itself, *Ficciones de verdad* [True Fictions or Fictions of the Truth].

One could easily begin with the paradigmatic novel of this *trans-genre*, Cervantes' *Don Quijote* (Chapter 7, p.93-

104). But this is not Patricia López-Gay starting point. Her point of departure is the post-Franco novels of Jorge Semprún, *Autobiografía* de Federico Sánchez (1977) and *Federico Sánchez se despide de ustedes* (1993). Here the hazy boundary between life and writing lurks in the very notion of what is an autobiography, i.e., a writing (*graphos*) of one's own (*auto*) life (*bios*). Just as René Magritte wrote beneath his painting of a pipe "*ceci n'est pas une pipe*," one could say the same thing of any autobiography—"this is not a life," but rather the representation of a life, which may be true or false, or most likely a combination of the two. Auto-fictions, then, whether they are presented as "autobiographies" or as "novels" "not only question what is real, but also what is reality" (29, my translation), and further, what is truth.

Though the author makes mention of the works of Ray Loriga, Juan Marsé, and Soledad Puértolas, et al, as examples of contemporary authors of auto-fiction, *Ficciones de verdad* focuses on the fictions of Javier Marías, Enrique Vila-Matas, and Marta Sanz (Chapters 11-13).

The auto-fictional narratives of today [e.g, Marías, Vila-Matas, Sanz] are singular in setting into motion old and not so old techniques of the archive, writes López-Gay. (41, my translation)

While Vila-Matas's suggests that "reality can be thought as fiction," or the literature of possible worlds as in Borges, for Marta Sanz [*La lección de anatomía* (2014) and *La clavícula* (2017)], the body is a surface of self-inscription (or self-tattooing), and therefore, a bodily archive in opposition to the fluidity and instability of the "selfie"—a photographic image that disappears the

moment it appears as it is immediately replaced by countless others, as Hegel's self-negating Now. It is in this sense, then, that as the author says, auto-fictional writings are driven by a desire for *bios*, for life. But insofar as *bios* is carnal, like Sanz's tattoo, it is also temporal. That is why López-Gay asserts that "auto-fiction is not a battle against death" (45, my translation). There is no beyond death. One ages, one dies. "I am not at all interested in the manipulation of selfies by Photoshop" (186), declares Marta Sanz: not out of any reverence for the existential authenticity of the original, but because the only archive that interests her is that of the body. The ontological significance of the *selfie* resides in making temporality palpable. (One can only think of all those people who have fallen to their death while photographing themselves at the Grand Canyon). What truth there may be in auto-fictions, as such, can only be provisional truths—the truths of an event, literary or otherwise. Semprún, Marías, Vila-Matas, each in their own unique way activate old and not so old technologies of the archive; and they do so because they belong to the archive of a different era.

In a society where History is irrelevant, the archive as a narrative of the past is equally irrelevant. Little, then, is left for the author or the artist who comes after the death of Master Narratives, of the Archive, but to creative auto-fictions that will be deposited into an amorphous archive no one can really locate. When Martí criticized his contemporaries for writing self-referential poetry, he did so because the Archive had already ceased to have any importance. Though he could not understand exactly what was happening, he instinctively felt that the archive of the individual had substituted the Historical archive. Both were fictions, only different forms of it. In one the

individual was swallowed up by History (as in Hegel), in other the Individual had erased History to make him or herself supreme, the creator of his/her own archive, even despite the horizon of temporality. All these and many more are the questions that are offered to us for thought in Patricia López-Gay's clear, concise, masterfully written, *Ficciones de verdad*. For *Ficciones de verdad* is a book for our times: on the negative side, the age of Kellyanne Conway's cynical "alternative truths" and academia's nihilistic "post-truth;" on the positive side, the age, as Nietzsche said in *The Gay Science*, of the death of God and the greatest freedom. *Mal d'Archive* is a diagnosis; whether the fever kills us or saves us, remains undecided. In the meantime, we may want to think of "archive fever" hermeneutically—as "a way of looking" (57), as Patricia López-Gay suggests.

Rolando Pérez
Hunter College/CUNY

Intersections of Race, Class, Gender, and Nation in Fin-de-siècle Spanish Literature and Culture

Routledge, 2017

edited by Jennifer Smith and Lisa Nalbone

La interseccionalidad constituye la base sobre la que se asientan los ensayos reunidos en este volumen colectivo editado por Jennifer Smith y Lisa Nalbone. La relevancia o novedad de este volumen estriba en el hecho de que es el primero que examina la forma en que las categorías de raza, clase, género y nación se influyeron mutuamente en el contexto de la literatura y la cultura en la España de fin de siglo para revelar situaciones en las que grupos dominados estaban dominando y viceversa. El concepto