AUTOFICTION IN PARÍS NO SE ACABA NUNCA BY ENRIQUE VILA- MATAS

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Abstract || This work seeks to explore the autofictional elements of Enrique Vila-Matas novel *París no se acaba nunca* (2003). In the form of an ironic review of his youth in Paris, the author makes use of several devices destined to fracture the mimesis of reality. Thus, the text is both in the line of the autofiction as well as in the line of other texts from the same author in which reality and literature are completely interdependent.

Keywords || Enrique Vila-Matas | *París no se acaba nunca* | Autofiction | Simulation | Autobiography | Identity | Generic hybridism | Reality | Fiction | Metatextuality | Irony | Temporality.
0. Introduction

A first approach to the works of Enrique Vila-Matas highlights the interwoven connections between reading, writing and the literary tradition as a constant in all his texts. All critical reviews generated by this author agree that his works mix up the notions of reality and fiction, and they highlight the role of writing, that becomes the main theme of his literary project. It seems inevitable to refer to the neologism coined by Serge Doubrovsky in his novel Fils (1977), in the backcover of which the French writer defined his work as follows: “Autobiographie? Fiction? La réponse est: autofiction (Doubroksvy 1988: 74)”. The aim of this paper is to analyze how the concept of autofiction is articulated in the text París no se acaba nunca (2003) by Enrique Vila-Matas, as long as it is presented as an ironic revision of the author’s youth taking traits from the novel and the autobiography.

Why should we propose a reading of Vila-Matas from the point of view of autofiction? An approach to his texts reveals that the practice of autofiction is closely related to the idea of literature and writing held by the author. In this sense, some of the premises of Doubrovsky turn out to be especially suitable to tackle the texts of Vila-Matas that supposedly participate in the autobiographical sphere. Thus, Doubrovsky (61) states that “le projet de l’autobiographie moderne […] consisterait moins à vouloir se peindre que s’écrire”. That idea is a constant in the work of Vila-Matas: the wish to convert the I into writing, “convertirse en literatura, ser él mismo el relato” (Rodríguez Fischer 2003: 86). Another aspect that relates Vila-Matas to autofiction is his idea of life like something fitted into literature. Thus, if autofiction “levanta, sin teorizaciones abstractas, la identidad como una ficción o la ficción de la identidad” (Alberca, 1999: 67) Vila-Matas uses it to carry out his literary practice. That is to say, the thematization of writing is finally part of a construction of identity inherent to the text itself. Identity, then, cannot escape literature, whereas it is built within “una red literaria que se concibe como un tejido de textos comunicados, que llevan de uno a otro” (Pozuelo Yvancos, 2007: 34). No wonder, then, the romance between Vila-Matas and autofiction has been one of the most productive of Spanish literature.

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1 | It is a critic and a literary answer to the repeatedly quoted empty cell of the autobiographical pact of Lejeune (1975).

2 | However, the literary practice of Vila-Matas is closer to the avant-garde of the early 20th century than to the experimentalism of three decades ago under which the neologism was coined.
1. Autofiction in París no se acaba nunca

1.1 The ironic agreement

What mechanisms are used to carry out the autofictional effect in the text by Vila-Matas? If autofiction is considered as a series of practices that have been gaining a generic space, still in the process of encoding (Colonna, 2004), in spite of showing a much higher degree of referentiality compared with other works of his, Vila-Matas’ text reveals certain features that bring it near autofiction.

When tracing the history of the concept of autofiction it is inevitable to run into Philippe Lejeune and his chart of the autobiographical pact or agreement. However, his conclusions about this analysis are much more interesting ten years after his first approach:

Salta a la vista que el cuadro está mal hecho. Para cada eje propongo una alternativa (novelesca/autobiográfica, para el pacto; diferente/igual, para el nombre), pienso en la posibilidad de ni uno ni otro, ¡pero olvido la de a la vez uno y otro! (Lejeune, 1994: 134-135)

The possibility of carrying out the autobiographical pact and the fictional pact simultaneously, developed later by Manuel Alberca (1996, 1999 and 2007) on a corpus of Spanish literature, becomes evident in París no se acaba nunca, where some facts similar to Enrique Vila-Matas’ the real life are narrated: his stay in Paris, the attic rented from Marguerite Duras, the writing of Asesina Ilustrada… displayed in a different way compared with the classic autobiography, showing the literary artifice so that the reader is hesitant until the end of the story (Alberca, 2007). After all, “¿no es la ficción un territorio donde lo imposible se hace posible y lo ambiguo es un rasgo distintivo e incluso un valor frente a otro tipo de discursos?” (Alberca, 2007: 240). This ambiguous pact mentioned by Manuel Alberca is carried out through different procedures. Already in the first pages of the book, the narrator seems to allude directly to a pact with the reader:

Cuando se finge el amor se corre el riesgo de llegar a sentirlo, quien parodia sin las debidas precauciones acaba siendo víctima de su propia astucia. […] Me gusta un tipo de ironía que yo llamo benévola, compasiva, como la que encontramos, por ejemplo, en el mejor Cervantes. No me gusta la ironía feroz sino la que se mueve entre la desilusión y la esperanza. ¿De acuerdo? (Vila-Matas, 2003: 11)

This comment, when finishing a declaration of intentions of this kind proposes a pact that Alberca (2007) would define as ambiguous but which, in a certain way, could be called “ironic pact”. That hesitant reading, whose distance from the autobiography does not prevent it from bringing strictly real facts to literature, is tinged with an essential irony. Faced with such an ironic narrator, an eventual agreement on

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3 | In Lejune’s chart (1994) the novel and the autobiography are distinguished based on the alternatives generated by the identification between the author and character, and the fictional or autobiographical pact which is established with the reader.

4 | Anna Caballé (1999: 22) understands “la autobiografía como ejercicio corrector del pasado”. In the case of París no se acaba nunca this process would also be carried out, but in a totally ironic way.

5 | Gasparini (2004) also speaks of a double reading, carried out simultaneously rather than alternate.
a biographical reading is not mechanical anymore, launching the “mentir-vrai” (Colonna, 2004: 93) of the biographical autofiction6.

1.2. The Tense Coexistence With the Double

Starting from that ironic variant of the autofiction, different characteristic elements appear, building the structure of a whole literary identity. The implicit or explicit7 identification of author and narrator has been considered one of the bases of autofictional modality (Lejeune, 1994 and Doubrovsky, 1980). In the case of París no se acaba nunca, the relationship between author, narrator and character is implicit, as the name of Enrique Vila-Matas does not appear in the text. In fact, this game is carried out from the paratext8, where the calculated ambiguity of certain terms used in the back cover of the book draws our attention:

París no se acaba nunca es una revisión irónica de los días de aprendizaje literario del narrador en el París de los años setenta. Fundiendo magistralmente autobiografía, ficción y ensayo, nos va contando la aventura en la que se adentró cuando, en una buhardilla de París, redactó su primer libro. […] En París no se acaba nunca, que es también el título del último capítulo de París era una fiesta, Enrique Vila-Matas nos ofrece el retrato del joven debutante en la vida y en el arte.

We can notice how the text avoids an identification of the author with the narrator, alternating the knowledge the reader might have about the life and works of Vila-Matas (since his days in París are also mentioned in other novels) with the dissociation between the author and the narrator. Thus, the literary training of the narrator is spoken about, not about that of the author, and Vila-Matas is only mentioned as the author of the text. Nevertheless, the regular reader of Vila-Matas is automatically impelled to suspect and to settle in the ambiguity of the reading. In that sense, the paradox is to show “al mismo tiempo tanto la disociación de autor y narrador (A ≠ N) como su identidad (A = N), en una alternancia o incertidumbre por la que un autor vendría a significar que A es ± N (Soy yo y no soy yo)” (Alberca, 2007: 153). This identity, implicit and dissociated at the same time, takes form by means of a series of signals made by the narrator to the figure of the double, since the division of the narrative voice is repeated in autofictional texts (Alberca, 2007). Similarly, in Historia abreviada de la literatura portátil (2005) one of the characteristics of the members of the shandy conspiracy was to have a “tensa convivencia con la figura del doble” (Vila-Matas, 2005: 13). No wonder, then, that París no se acaba nunca begins with a contest of doubles of Hemingway from which the narrator is, ironically, disqualified. Hemingway’s double is instituted as what Vila-Matas has never been nor could be. Hemingway is the figure of the writer who lives and writes, whereas Vila-Matas chooses the option of the writer who lives in what he writes. Precisely, the dichotomy

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6 | Vincent Colonna (2004) borrows the term of mentir-vrai from Louis Aragon (1980) in order to conceptualize different types of autofiction.

7 | The term “identification” seems to fit better to autofictional ambiguity than that of “identity” which is much more categorical.

8 | From a different perspective, Foucault (1991) might be considered the first to problematize the notions of work, author and writing, highlighting the complexity of the author-function.

9 | Gasparini (2004) has been devoted to an in-depth analysis of the importance of these elements to define autofiction as a literary genre, although Lejeune (1994) already noted that the reading contract depended on the paratext.
between life and literature is one of the elements that “tensa y organiza esta ficción autobiográfica en todos los planos” (Rodríguez Fischer, 2007: 340) and it is also an option which assumes literature as a biographical project. In that sense, París no se acaba nunca is also the novel on how Vila-Matas did not become Hemingway, and instead became like Thomas Mann:

Ironías del destino. […] yo acabaría teniendo en Barcelona siempre el mismo escritorio y cuidaría hasta extremos patológicos y con supersticiones de todo tipo la disposición de mis objetos sobre la mesa de trabajo, es decir, que me convertiría en un escritor sedentario, en un Thomas Mann cualquiera. (Vila-Matas, 2003: 77)

Another splitting into two of the protagonist occurs in chapter 31, in which he tells how he met a young man, who “tenía cierto aire diabólico y cierto aspecto de asesino, se parecía mucho a mí en la época en que escribí La asesina ilustrada” (Vila-Matas, 2006: 66). The encounter with himself, always hesitant, without giving any guarantees to the reader (connoisseurs of Vila-Matas’ narrative will not look for them either), is still a synthesis of the structure of the novel, articulated like a game of Russian dolls inserted one into the other. In this way, París no se acaba nunca would be the story of a narrator, implicitly identified with the writer Enrique Vila-Matas, about an aspiring writer who on many occasions just pretends to be a writer, while he also identifies himself with the narrator/author that tells the story. This is a common game in autofiction, dramatized through this disturbing encounter, in which the narrator “nos mira de soslayo y, entre escéptico y cínico, nos espeta: ¡Éste (no) soy yo?” (Alberca, 2007: 224). Likewise, this scene also suggests the literary artifice, breaking with the parameters of realism and classical autobiography: “Vi que siempre había dependido de aquel joven asesino y que si él me olvidaba, yo moriría. Y viceversa, claro” (Vila-Matas, 2003: 67). We are no longer with the figure of the writer recalling his youth in order not to lose it: Vila-Matas violates the linear view of time of our memory so that character and narrator just depend on each other.

The third signal for the dissociation of the author/narrator, and perhaps the most evident regarding the genesis of the identity of the author, is explained by Jean Marais: “Fabricate un doble de ti mismo—dijo Marais—que te ayude a afirmarte y pueda incluso llegar a suplantarte, a ocupar la escena y dejarte tranquilo para trabajar lejos del ruido” (Vila-Matas, 2003: 140). That is exactly what Vila-Matas seems to be doing regarding himself then, as Alberca (2007: 206) points out, “el objetivo de hacerse invisible tras la propia identidad es una de las metas de Vila-Matas en sus relatos”. Finally, in addition, that double of himself would monopolize any biographical trace.

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10 | In fact, the whole construction of the narrator-character pivots on several models of literary doubles, Vidal Escabia/Juan Herrera, Rimbaud/Mallarmé and Hemingway/Thomas Mann.
1.3. Formal resources

When Lejeune (1994) speaks about the double nature of the autobiography, which swings between the truthful narration, and the forms taken from a certain type of novels, he seems to be emphasizing the artifice implied in narrating a life through the realistic canon, since “narratológicamente hablando, apenas hay diferencias entre una autobiografía y una novela escrita en primera persona” (Caballé, 1999: 22). Autofiction formally attacks mimesis as the only way to represent reality, either because it is language that creates the referent (De Man, 1991), or because it approaches the barriers between life and literature so as to demonstrate to what extent they oppose each other (Alberca, 2007).

In the case of Vila-Matas, this autofictional trend meets again his own concept of literature, from which he often attacks “los escritores realistas que duplican la realidad empobreciéndola” (Vila-Matas, 2003: 89). Autofiction uses several resources that go back to Modernism and the Avant-guard movements of the beginning of the century, in order to carry out a separation from realism and, at the same time, to show the literary artifice implied in any autobiography. In *París no se acaba nunca* generic hybridism, the handling of the different temporalities, and meta-discursivity are specially emphasized.

The mixture of genres is evident without having to open the book, as the back cover, previously mentioned, already refers to a story that mixes autobiography, fiction and essay forms. In this line, Alberca (1996: 14) mentions that the “especificidad [de las autoficciones] está reforzada por el fingimiento de los géneros, la hibridación y la mezcla indisoluble”, whereas Colonna (2004: 30) mentions “un pastiche de beaucoup de genres”. However, it is a resource that was already used in other works by Enrique Vila-Matas, distant from autofiction such as *Breve historia de la literatura portátil* (1985) or *Suicidios ejemplares* (1991).

First of all, the novel takes the form of an ironic *bildungsroman*, whose main intertext is Hemingway’s novel *A Moveable Feast* (1964). Like the story of the American writer, Vila-Matas’ is a story of training in which, in this case, the protagonist seems to have not learned anything, except “a escribir a máquina y recibir el criminal consejo de Queneau” (Vila-Matas, 2003: 232). Actually Vila-Matas spent the rest of his days following Queneau’s advice, “Usted escriba, no haga otra cosa en la vida” (Vila-Matas, 2003: 232). The only thing he learns in Paris is something which his narrative will be based on: writing as a way of life. Even so, the narrator is the one that draws the conclusions on learning carried out on previous years. The young protagonist of the story, however, closes the book without seeming
to have learned much.

Within this intertextual frame different genres are involved. Most evident is the use of the conference as narrative procedure (Cordero, 2008), not free of irony that appears at the beginning of the novel. Opening the novel, Vila-Matas sets a series of mechanisms in motion which, at least, draw our attention:

Quedé muy sorprendido porque precisamente acababa de escribir en París un pliego de notas para una conferencia que llevaba el mismo título y estaba enmarcada en el mismo simposio y encima también duraba tres días. Y en fin. Se me quedó una gran cara de idiota cuando me di cuenta de que era yo mismo quien acababa de arrojar ese pliego de notas sobre mi asiento [...]. Todo lo que puedo ahora decirles es que éstas iban a dar origen a “París no se acaba nunca”, la conferencia que a lo largo de estos tres días voy a tener el honor de dictarles a ustedes. (Vila-Matas, 2003: 10-11)

The narrator of Vila-Matas refers with humor to fundamental questions. Beyond the wink at the use of the found manuscript resource, in this passage he is bringing to bear, on the one hand, one of the problems the autofiction deals with: the alienation of oneself, the non-recognition of one’s own identity. On the other hand, it already marks one of the generic lines of the novel: the conference and the essay. Even if the reader accepted that what he is reading was originally a conference that has been published as a novel11, the narrator quickly takes care of making the reader hesitate a few pages later: “¿Soy conferencia o soy novela? Dios, qué pregunta” (Vila-Matas, 2003: 16). At this point, there is no choice but to accept the rules of the game and to assume that we are in front of a literary artifice. Similarly, a conference is an act in which a pact of veracity prevails, and it is broken by the narrator when he has doubts regarding the essence of the thing he is relating. In addition, the conference belongs to the area of the essay, with a scientific and theoretical character. However, in *París no se acaba nunca* the conference is full of narrativity and loses its doctrinal purity.

Me han dicho que usted se llama Clara. ¿Es así? ¿No? Bueno, tampoco soy un adivino. La verdad es que nadie me ha dicho que se llamara así. […] Desde luego usted, la que no se llama Clara, es la mujer nueva de esta conferencia, de eso no tengo la menor duda, como tampoco la tengo de que París no se acaba nunca. Está bien, márchese nadie se lo impide. Que conste que no quise molestarla. (Vila-Matas, 2003: 156)

This passage, full of humor, supposes a rupture with any class of conventional pact. In this way, by breaking the literary illusion, it is so far from the pact of fiction as it is from that of veracity, since a direct demand of this type could not fit into the usual parts of a conference. Again, Vila-Matas sets his own pact with the reader, in which he must accept the rules of the game and accept the artifice of the literary

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11 | In fact, it seems that the novel arose from a conference, according to Vila-Matas: “se iba a llamar *La ironía en París*. Nace de una conferencia que me invitó a pronunciar la Fundación Luis Goytisolo. Para prepararla, lei muchos ensayos sobre la ironía pero vi que no sabía hablar teóricamente del tema y que me saldría un bodrio de conferencia” (Pàmies, 2007: 333).
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452ºF. #01 (2009), 89-103.

If the conference and the essay are on one side of the narration, on the other side there is a balance (and the pact becomes more ambiguous) with the resources of the novel and fiction. One of those resources is the temporal structure. Compared with other texts of the same author, París no se acaba nunca presents a double temporality that responds to the scheme of many classic autobiographies: an adult I located in the present who recalls his years of learning in the past, trying to grant them a meaning. However, this structure is continuously altered and interrupted. Thus, the adult I who remembers is divided into two, the narrator who gives the conference and the one who travelled to Paris in August and walks through the places he knew as a young man. In addition, there can be established another line formed by the time of literature, consisting of the literary digressions the narrator indulges himself in. One of the best examples of this temporal line, in which all times are mixed, is the story about the liberation of the Ritz Hotel’ bar done by Hemingway, or his trip to France with Scott Fitzgerald. The balance of this literary temporality with the others is one of the constants of the narrative of Vila-Matas. In París no se acaba nunca the anecdotes from other writers are matched to the stories of the young substitute of Vila-Matas, “engarzándose mediante un ars combinatoria que funde el tiempo del narrador con el de otros autores y obras de la literatura universal, hasta lograr esa identificación coral, políédrica, cuestionándose a sí misma desde la ironía y la paradoja” (Otxoa, 2007: 31).

A good example of the organization of these temporalities, one fitted into another, occurs in chapter 20. The narrative voice is placed in a recent trip to Paris and recalls the search of Dingo Bar, which leads it to talk about a trip done by Hemingway and Fitzgerald. Meanwhile, the narrator’s wife goes to a cybercafé to look for the old location of the bar, in a very similar manner to to the protagonist of the story of Hemingway “Cat in the rain”.

Another remarkable aspect is the configuration of Paris as a referential and literary place at the same time. Vila-Matas speaks about Paris and his years of learning, but to do it, he must turn to to literature, to the Paris of Hemingway, Scott Fitzgerald or Pío Baroja. The Paris of the literary texts is very much explored than the real Paris. Even with totally referential places like the Café de Flore, the narrator enters it as if he entered in a literary story: “Ya el día que fui por primera vez al Flore sospeché que entrar en él significaba pedir asilo literario en café, pasar a formar parte de una cadena de generaciones de escritores que se había exiliado allí, exactamente allí” (Vila-Matas, 2003: 80). In a certain way, Vila-Matas constructs a completely intertextual Paris, from the Pont des Arts, where he can
see Cortázar’s *la Maga*, to the house of Gertrude Stein, creating a space through which the entire literary tradition in which he seeks to enter passes.

Another common resource of autofiction and which Vila-Matas also uses in the novel is that of self-commentary or meta-discourse (Gasparini, 2004). Apart from the intertexts that build the story and link it to “a las formas más manifiestas del citacionismo literario, a veces fruto de la pura invención” (Morelli, 2007: 330), *París no se acaba nunca* also presents a high degree of metatextuality. First of all, it is necessary to emphasize the use of the mise *in abyme* that is recurrent in the autofictional genre (Gasparini, 2004): within the text the process of creation of another text is inserted, *La asesina ilustrada*, a novel published in 1977 by the real author12. Writing is the main theme in the texts of Vila-Matas, so that “gran parte de las novelas las protagonizan textos en gestación, ya terminados o nunca elaborados, y sus creadores” (Sánchez, 2007: 67). Indeed, not only the writing of the novel is told in *París no se acaba nunca*, but also the writer takes the chance to talk about how to write a novel. To do this, he uses the sheet of paper where he wrote the advices Marguerite Duras gave him on how to be a good writer (which are thoroughly analyzed by the protagonist as his training moves forward), as well as self-commentary of his own writing:

> En *La asesina ilustrada*, disocié demasiado entre forma y contenido, entre la emoción y la expresión de la emoción, del pensamiento, que tendrían que ser inseparables. Emoción y pensamiento deberían ser siempre inseparables, que el lector asista en directo a la creación de un texto de pensamiento conmovido. (Vila-Matas, 2003: 113)

Thus, while criticizing the novel whose genesis he is narrating, he specifies the appropriate features for a good novel; implicitly emphasizing that *París no se acaba nunca* does allows the reader to witness “un texto de pensamiento conmovido”.

Another metaliterary expression is constituted by the scenes in which the narrator has the feeling of being part of a novel or a story. Apart from the story of Hemingway previously mentioned, a sample of it is the search of the old clandestine bookstore in rue Littre in which the narrator remembers to have seen Borges giving a conference, indeed, about the impossibility of possessing youth memories. Accompanied by his wife and Sergio Pitol, the narrator begins to feel all of them inside a short story.

> De pronto, me pareció que él [Sergio Pitol] se estaba moviendo como si estuviera dentro de uno de sus relatos. Y recordé que sus cuentos serian cuentos cerrados si acabaran revelándonos algo que jamás nos revelarán: el misterio que viaja con cada uno de nosotros. (Vila-Matas, 2003: 152)

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12 | Also, *La Asesina Ilustrada*, presents another metafictional mechanism in which the readers of the novel are killed from within the pages of the book.
Indeed, the chapter is closed as a tale of Pitol, without actually knowing the answer, but “con la impresión de haber estado más cerca que nunca de la invisible verdad” (Vila-Matas, 2003: 153).

1.4. Reality, fiction and simulation

One of the themes that covers the text is that of simulation. With sufficient ironic distance, the narrator explains how the protagonist spends the entire novel simulating to be a writer, an intellectual, a situationist, an existentialist, a bohemian or Ernest Hemingway. From humor, as when he uses a fake pipe to go to the coffees of Paris—and which seems to pay homage to Magritte—, to direct reflection on which he recognizes that after faking so much despair he ended up in despair. In several occasions, the simulation is so extreme that ends up conquering reality: “Por otra parte, tanto simular desesperación me llevaba a pasar los días enteros desesperado de verdad” (Vila-Matas, 2003: 146). In another level, the concept of simulation is very close to that of pretense, posed as “una especie de doble juego de manos: uno se convierte en personaje de novela para luego convertir ese personaje de novela en uno mismo” (Lejeune: 1994: 185). In this way, if fake desperation ends up being real desperation, the simulation of becoming a character would end up being the only identity of the narrator. In this context, the narrator will declare that “el arte es el único método del que disponemos para decir ciertas verdades” (Vila-Matas, 2003: 78), so that artistic imposture will end up prevailing over reality. Vila-Matas belongs to a line of thought similar to that of Doubrovsky (1980: 78) when he says “fictif, pour un sujet, l’est du même ordre réel. La fiction n’est pas fantaisie. If classical autobiography could problematize the distinction between biographical truth and discursive truth (Caballe, 1999), Vila-Matas puts discursive truth on a main level, assuming the impossibility of leaving it, and letting himself be carried away by “une euphorie verbal, a hédonisme d’écriture” (Darrieussecq, 1996: 370) —typical of many autofictions— which gives his texts a characteristic playful dimension.

In that game of simulation of being, the idea of “autofictional pose” defined by Doubrovsky on the back cover of Fils (1977) can be brought up: “Je suis un nabot. Un type timide, rien qu’un prof. Un type qui n’a rien fait de grand dans sa vie, et qui donc ne mérite pas ce panthéon qu’est l’autobiographie”. Faced with the “pose autobiographique” (Darrieussecq, 1996: 372), which is understood as the one assumed by a “grand-homme-au-soir-de-sa-vie-et-dans-un-beau-style” (Doubrovsky, 1989: 256), autofiction is highlighted as the autobiography of those who do not have the right to History. This idea is crossed with another constant in the work of Vila-Matas, “el esfuerzo del individuo por deshacerse, como si de una piel de
The ending seems to refer to Vila-Matas’ attempt to incorporate the author to the work, so that the author in the text becomes more interesting than the author of the text. Thus, the only way to access that author/person, who is probably grayer than the reader can imagine, is through the texts. To do this, Vila-Matas uses language both to construct himself and to expel that version of himself. “El yo de las autoficciones oscila entre la carencia de una identidad propia y la necesidad de auto-invención, para concluir en muchas ocasiones que el autoconocimiento es imposible” (Alberca, 2007: 213). The objective of configuring such a dull guy in the novel would be, in the first place, the irony about the years of learning and the parody of certain autobiographies in which an exciting youth is narrated. In the second place, note that in the previous quotation, the reader does not know whether that gray being the mother is referring to, is the I of the past, the one of the present or both at the same time. Again, he uses irony to assert how insipid the protagonist and narrator of the novel that is ending actually is. In this way, the text seems the only place where a person can be other than a mediocre guy. “La ficción es el lugar en que cometer el crimen contra la realidad: crimen que se resuelve en el espacio de la escritura y que es eco de otros crímenes –los perpetrados por la asesina ilustrada en el espacio de la lectura--” (Oñoro, 2008: 38-39).

2. Conclusion

If literature is the place where Vila-Matas’ narrators decided to live (Manuel Alberca, 2007), París no se acaba nunca is the staging of that “literaturization” of his own life. Using irony as “un potente artefacto para desactivar la realidad” (Vila-Matas, 2003: 33), the author/narrator explores the way to dissolve the biographical experience in the literary experience, in such a way that the former cannot exist without the latter. This essay has attempted to show how this project is carried out in one of the most referential texts of Vila-Matas. Nevertheless, a deep analysis has shown how the text uses the necessary form and content resources to question the referentiality of the text. Besides, the novel does not limit itself to the showing of its own artifice, to evidence “la pratique ‘naïve’ de l’autobiographie” (Darrieussecq, 1996: 379), but also resorts to
literature as a guarantee of its existence.

En fin, el héroe de la autoficción […] hace de la fragmentación y la falta de unidad del sujeto un motivo contradictorio de estímulo al autoconocimiento y de necesidad de construirse un mito personal, un suplemento de ficción o viático que le ayuda a transitar por el desierto del ser. (Alberca, 2007: 281)

Given this context, autofiction is configured as a generic practice that perfectly suits Vila-Matas conception of life and literature, because in his case the biographical project and writing coincide. Thus, the autofictional text allows for the approximation, confusion or even elimination of the difference between reality and fiction. However, Vila-Matas manages to build a novel far from self-absorption and metafictional coldness, which some texts of this type contain (Ródenas de Moya, 2007). The use of narrativity, of lived and literary anecdotes, grants this novel the emotion that, according to the narrator, La asesina ilustrada lacks. Simultaneously, irony deactivates “cualquier engolamiento pretencioso” (Alberca, 2007: 139) which could recall the classical autobiography. The result is a hybrid, fragmented story that shows a Vila-Matas who, following Raul Escari’s advice, has tried to make himself visible, really.
Bibliography


