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Literary news about Albert Sánchez Piñol on Lletra, the UOC's virtual space devoted to Catalan literature

< <http://lletra.uoc.edu/en/author/albert-sanchez-pinyol> >

## Albert Sánchez Piñol



It's been said...

Albert Sánchez Piñol (Barcelona, 1965) is an anthropologist who specializes in Africa. His first novel, *Cold Skin*, was a literary and publishing phenomenon. It

has been translated into twenty-two languages in twenty-four different countries. He has also published various short stories as well as a satirical non-fiction essay about the nature of dictatorship.

The day I met Albert Sánchez Piñol we were surrounded by people who were watching us. We had arranged to meet at Barcelona's Modern Art Museum, then at the Ciutadella park, in order to record one of the interviews for the TV programme *Alexandria*. It was a triple bill, featuring Albert and two real veterans - Josep Maria Espinàs and Ana María Matute. His novel *La pell freda* (*Cold Skin: A Novel*) had been harvesting no end of readers, yet the author was a complete unknown. He did not like to show himself very much in public. But not only that. He had a reputation for being a very reserved person. I had liked the novel very much. But I even liked better the fact that for the first time in recent history a text in Catalan had won international acclaim by itself, without any institutional help of any kind. I rang Isabel Martí, the publisher, and I also rang Albert later, foregoing the customary intermediaries of television practice. He probably liked what I said to him, because he turned up at the Museum and we recorded one of the best interviews I can recall.

Two details from that day stick out in my mind. The museum had seen the last day of its life there. The collection would be transferred to the Catalan National Art Museum (MNAC) and the old building would be taken over by the Catalan Parliament. If an art museum has normally an air of a cemetery, that day the elegiac tone was the dominant note. While I was getting changed for the interview with Albert alone in one of those museum rooms, at one stage I raised my eyes and came across the stony look of Llimona's master sculpture *Distress*. In those very moments, as I was walking around in underpants in the presence of this lady in distress, the Parliament, next to the Museum, indeed, next door to it, was getting ready to celebrate the fact that Pasqual Maragall was about to take office as President of Catalonia.

Ever since that day, now distant, in which I was confronted with Llimona's stony *Distress*, I have occasionally run into Albert here and there. He seems to be progressively less reserved, yet the fact of being reserved does not stop him from speaking his mind. And he speaks it exactly as he writes. Mincing no words. I love his uncompromising radicalism. His writing distils independence of thought. We, Catalans, are the offspring of a country in its death throes that still does not know what it wants to be when it grows up, but luckily we've still got Piñol. I like countries with "pinyol", that is, with backbone.

**Màrius Serra**, "Amb pinyol", *La Universitat*, num., 31 (March 2005)

The central character of *La pell freda* is fear. Never mind the now already famous "granotots" (frog-monsters) or the aggressive Batis Caffó. It is fear. The delocalised Irishman in an unknown island experiences fear and makes us experience it when he fights simultaneously with the

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amphibious beasts of an unknown nature, and with the only other human being in the island. "That gun butt that was thumping me like a club was not hate", we read, "but fear". Fear is the driving force in the world evoked by the novel. This omnipresent force gives tension to a moral narrative written with an austerity of means. Sánchez Piñol favours direct style. He thinks that the perfect sentence is made up of four words, and he flees from those subordinate-clause structures that Pla used to call "sentences with a fish tail". An intelligent use of the keys to the fantastic genre allows him to keep the readers of *La pell freda* attentive to the ground they are treading on. Regardless of the temptation to look up felt by the eyes concentrated on the text, the narrative of the facts compels the reader to keep looking down. It is like an excursion across a landscape from childhood that we would like to look at again to check whether it agrees with our memory of it, but the terrain is so uneven that we must check where we put our feet at every step. Nothing of what we read there is alien to us. Many fears that we are not even capable of naming enter us through our eyes, paragraph after paragraph.

"But the landscape that the eyes see, from the inside to the outside", says the narrator, "tends to be the reflection of what it hides, from the outside to the inside". The ideas that form in the head of the reader while he or she is drawn by the events of the plot have a strong moral component. Each violent episode that we are witness leads us to question the world seen as a confrontation between the good and the evil. The source of evil is not at all clear, but its consequences become evident to us. The terrible obstacles to mere human survival in that insular isolation provoke in the attentive reader a growing disquiet. "Whether individuals may be better or worse by nature, it is totally irrelevant", we read in an emendation to Rousseau's entire opus. "The question is whether, once they are together, the society that they form is good or evil". The only society appearing in the novel is that of the frog-monsters, although we come to know rather little about them, beyond the fear provoked by their night incursions. Instead, the only two human inhabitants of the island bring us closer to the abysses of social life. In their minds the pronoun for the first person plural is a mutating being. Aneris, the siren-like creature - a female frog-monster who closes the circle because she doesn't give them pain - but pleasure - makes the boundaries between "us" and "them" still more diffuse.

Perhaps the best feature of *La pell freda* is its clear determination to make us think without managing our thought. Sánchez Piñol is wholly successful at this, although he uses means that are very distant from the intellect. In this novel we witness to the fact that deeds precede thoughts at all times. The narrator already makes this clear when the conflictive relationship between humans and beasts is modified by the irruption of many young frog-monsters: "As is well known by all, children cannot hide what they think. It is also true that their tolerance is based on what they see, not on what they believe". It could not be clearer. Beliefs lose steam in this island so different from the one imagined by Golding for his *Lord of the Flies*. In the wake of the novel's success, Sánchez Piñol has spoken of the Conrad of *The Heart of Darkness*, of Stevenson or of Michael Tournier. Some readers will also find traces of Poe, Lovecraft or the Karel Capek of *War with Newts*. But basically, what the readers of *La pell freda* observe is that the most poignant elements of the novel are not at all explicit, and perhaps this is what has led so many people to read it with such relish. The readers of *La pell freda* are being challenged to think by themselves. They feel capable of it. And there is no stopping the enthusiasm of a capable reader.

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## Biography



**WEB: A la Hiperenciclopèdia**

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**WEB: Fitxa al "Qui és qui a les lletres catalanes"**

<http://cultura.gencat.net/ilc/qeq/fitxaAutors.asp?nom2=Pi%F1ol&cerca2=Cercar&quiform=form1&NRegistre=&idregistre=11451>



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Breu nota biobibliogràfica dins l'espai dedicat a la Fira Internacional del Llibre de Guadalajara 2004.  
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**WEB: The author in the Who's Who of Catalan Literature**

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**WEB: Albert Sánchez Piñol in the Ramon Llull Institute**

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**WEB: Què hi ha a les biblioteques universitàries catalanes (CCUC)**

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**WEB: Què hi ha a les biblioteques públiques**

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**WEB: Per comprar-ne llibres**

<http://www.llibres.cat/ca/detall-autor/sanchez-pinol-albert>



**WEB: Articles de l'autor (Traces)**

<http://traces.uab.cat/search?f=author&p=S%C3%A1nchez%20Pi%C3%B1ol%20Albert&sc=1&ln=ca>



**WEB: Articles sobre l'autor (Traces)**

[http://traces.uab.cat/search?ln=ca&p=S%C3%A1nchez+Pi%C3%B1ol%2C+Albert&f=keyword&action\\_search=Cerca&c=Traces+%3A+base+dades+de+llengua+i+literatura+catalanes&sf=&so=d&r](http://traces.uab.cat/search?ln=ca&p=S%C3%A1nchez+Pi%C3%B1ol%2C+Albert&f=keyword&action_search=Cerca&c=Traces+%3A+base+dades+de+llengua+i+literatura+catalanes&sf=&so=d&r)

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<http://search.theeuropeanlibrary.org/portal/en/search/%28%22creator%22+all+%22s%C3%A1nchez+pi%C3%B1ol+albert%22%29.query>



**WEB: The author in the Congress Library (US)**

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**WEB: The author in the COPAC Catalogue (UK)**

<http://copac.ac.uk/search?&au=Albert+S%C3%A1nchez+Pi%C3%B1ol>

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## Comments on the author

### Criticism



**WEB: Albert Sánchez Piñol on the Lletra website in Catalan**

Including more resources and reading suggestions.

<http://www.uoc.edu/lletra/noms/asanchezpinol/index.html>

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### Miscellaneous



**WEB: 25 traduccions i... cap al cine?**

Marçal Lladó escriu sobre l'èxit editorial de *La pell freda*. A laMalla.net.

[http://www.lamalla.net/canal/actualitat\\_cultural/literatura/article.asp?id=160376](http://www.lamalla.net/canal/actualitat_cultural/literatura/article.asp?id=160376)



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Notícia de l'entrevista a Albert Sánchez Piñol al programa Alexandria (14/01/04).

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**WEB: Albert Sánchez Piñol in Wikipedia**

More information about the author, in German.

[http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Albert\\_S%C3%A1nchez\\_Pi%C3%B1ol](http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Albert_S%C3%A1nchez_Pi%C3%B1ol)

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## Comments



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Article d'Anna Romero sobre *La pell freda* i l'estil narratiu de l'autor. *Caràcters*, núm. 26 (gener 2004).  
<http://www.uv.es/caracters/textos/n26/annaromero26.htm>



### PDF: **"Novel·la de negres"**

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### WEB: **La pell freda (Cold Skin: A Novel)**

Reading suggestion in the Seminar "El gust per la lectura".  
<http://www.edu365.com/eso/muds/catala/lectures/pell/index.htm>



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Ester Colominas talks to Albert Sánchez Piñol. *La Universitat*, num., 31 (March 2005).  
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### WEB: **"Monsters in a frozen land"**

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**WEB: Proposta de lectura sobre *La pell freda***

Recursos de lectura per als estudiants d'ESO al web de l'edu365.

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