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Literary news about Sergi Pàmies on Lletra, the UOC's virtual space devoted to Catalan literature

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Sergi Pàmies



Sergi Pàmies

Manel Ollé

Sergi Pàmies was born in Paris in 1960. Until he was eleven years old he lived in the immigrant neighbourhood of Gennevilliers. For ten years, between 1979 and 1989, he worked as an accountant leading a double life as a writer. Then, three years after publishing his first book, he joined the "prostituted profession of the media". Since then he has been caught up in the wheels within wheels of the machinery that has set apart some of the most potent myths among those that retain us and those that entertain us, for example, television or football. He moves through all the wheeling and dealing, regards things and conjures them up, his only resort being the ephemeral word that crystallises and then suddenly melts away into the din. The more banal, predictable and absurd the raw material, the more Sergi Pàmies reveals its other face, the mirage and the tenderness of it. There are some who, with their eyes rolled back, demand from him a literature of ideas without even being able to recognise this intelligence in movement, this voracious and implacable intelligence that gobbles up everything without being disgusted by anything.

Sergi Pàmies published his first book in September 1986. This was the collection of short stories called *T'hauria de caure la cara de vergonya*, [You Should Be Ashamed of Yourself], which was followed the next year by another collection of stories titled *Infecció* [Infection]. In Sergi Pàmies' stories and even his novels, the most important thing is the always the opening sentence. After that, everything rushes along in a cascade that is at once unpredictable and of a ruthless and crystal-clear logic. There are no cracks in the tension of his style and the power of his imaginative unfolding of the story. The taut, transparent surface of the narrative projects well-defined voices and images of such crispness that it is very difficult to talk about it in any way that is not superfluous. He constructs his fiction with an apparently deliberate lack of sophistication that can even be offensive to lovers of programmed convolution, or to those for whom reading is just a way of momentarily -and uselessly- feeling that one is better and wiser than others or than oneself. His writing is not based on the sensationalism of the surprise ending but in the power of a direct, effective style and the impact of an imagination that is modulated in the service of all sorts of registers: tenderness, sarcasm, magic or sordidness. Right from the beginning, Sergi Pàmies has shown that he is particularly gifted in his forthrightly defining the revealing position taken by the narrator with regard to the events being related (somewhere between irony and impassivity) and in skilfully and sagely constructing a series of disturbing situations. Sergi Pàmies does not belong to that race of writers who have "a world"; he is of those who have "a gaze". His is a voice that sees and that comes out as precise, analytical writing. The standpoint he adopts in relationship with the world being scrutinised, a world governed by the run-of-the-mill poetry of the grey man in the street, is defined as follows by the French critic Patrick Rechichian: "No prejudice blocks his gaze and this gives his well-crafted, measured and calculated writing an undeniable effectiveness".

The characters in the stories of Sergi Pàmies are solitary, dissatisfied beings, rather grey, without story or epic, without past or future, trapped in an anxiety-laden present from which they are trying to escape. They move in a contemporary jungle in which fantastic cracks appear (old folk who rent out memories, cash points with a moral conscience that refuse to cough up the money asked for, faces

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that literally drop in shame, plants that only grow when they are told lies, the foetus that resists being born until daddy comes back from the war...). They circulate among all kinds of misunderstandings, commonplaces and advertising or journalistic mirages, making of their troubled journey through existence an apprenticeship in disappointment. Sergi Pàmies works with the masks of fear. His characters move between the compulsion to flee and that of holding somebody's gaze. He doesn't write for philologists or any kind of bluestocking: he is constantly seeking characters and themes one doesn't usually find in books, letting out an anti-intellectual side of himself that exasperates the culture vultures. He partakes of contemporary narrative forms (cinema, advertising, story, television, radio...) and incorporates them as relevant influences in his work. At no point has he ever claimed that he is heir to any literary tradition.

In 1990 Sergi Pàmies published his first novel, *La primera pedra* [The First Stone]. This is the self-portrait of a plumber who is constantly being eclipsed at work, in love and in football, yet nowhere in the novel does he give any sign that his subaltern and, at first sight, not very brilliant position gets to him: it seems that he doesn't want to make the headlines. *La primera pedra* brings together some of the most relevant episodes in the life of this assistant plumber. The contrast between the seeming mediocrity of what is narrated and the absence of any negative emotional charge in the view he gives of himself is one of the keys to the book. A total zero but not a failure and not remotely bitter, the assistant plumber who is the protagonist in *La primera pedra* details situations that go from the most exhilarating hilariousness to the most heart-warming tenderness with an intensity and touch of irony that is the bedrock of the lucidity with which he accepts himself in this crash course of making pessimism compatible with a sort of anonymous and grey half-happiness.

Two years later, Sergi Pàmies published the novel *L'instint* [Instinct] (1992). In this novel -ironically defined as "rurban"- Pàmies makes something happen in a place where nothing ever happens. He cuts off the power in a small mountain village and sets about illuminating with his writing what is hidden in the dark. The characters who don't sleep, and those who sleep too, drift through the novel guided by something that is halfway between disorientation and intuition, releasing into circulation a host of reactions, encounters and apparently irrelevant conversations. With precise voice and deadpan mien, the narrator registers all kinds of information. He doesn't need to put the fiction through the strainer of any narrative scheme or previous idea of what should be recorded or what is the best way of conveying it. This is in good part the ironic game of the book: the contrast that is established between tone and content. He can talk about candles, suitcases or books, as reasonable, feeling people might do, or he can talk about a resident of the village as if he were a broken-down motor. A crossroads of minimal stories that neither begin nor end the novel, *L'instint* incorporates strange snippets of information, quotes, paraphrases, data or references about such a wide range of matters as the reproduction of mules, the New York blackout of 1977, how contraceptive pills work and their contraindications, and what attracted Ursula Andress to Fabio Testi. Pàmies plays at his usual dissolution of high culture and popular culture: he organises the materials of the novel's thematic wadding as if in sections of a magazine.

The third novel, *Sentimental* (1995) begins with the old chestnut of the man who goes out to buy tobacco and never comes home. His constant flight brings about an extreme acceleration of the narrative, with fires, accidents and murders. In the space of a few pages, we go from Brussels to Lisbon to Rio de Janeiro. Locked in the hull of a ship, the man has died, is reborn and is transfigured. The novel becomes a love story after which the man is taken away by some strange beings and is trapped forever more inside a sofa. The accumulation of arbitrary events and rupturing of conventions in a yarn that swings between detailed storytelling, recreational metaphysics and analysis of emotions is reminiscent of the narrative style of Jean Echenoz. In the end, the man becomes pure gaze,

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invisible and absent from the fiction, and focused on the emotional material that surrounds him.

La gran novel·la sobre Barcelona [The Great Barcelona Novel] (1997) represents Pàmies' comeback to the short story after his three-novel cycle. This time, the novelty is in its variety of registers and formats and the appearance of a new kind of long, complex and seemingly digressive tale. In this collection is the beginning of Pàmies' abandoning of play for play's sake and of his swimming against the tide of narrative convention. Sergi Pàmies always tended to avoid autobiographical expansiveness in his books, taking a good distance from what he puts on the page but, in his last three books, he has been writing from closer up.

In 2000 he published *L'últim llibre de Sergi Pàmies* [The Last Book of Sergi Pàmies], a lucid and intense work of high emotional voltage. Inverting the title of Enrique Vila-Matas' book *Hijos sin hijos* [Sons without Sons], Pàmies' book could easily have been called *Fills amb fills* [Sons with Sons]. *L'últim llibre de Sergi Pàmies* gains in concentration and imaginative specificity and gains, too, in its span of registers and formats. What is told can only be told in the way it is told, the situations and characters are more nuanced and the scenes he presents contain the latent tension that explodes at the end. The trace of admiration that remains in suspense beneath the last line satisfies the interrogative interest and curiosity that has been aroused at the start. Pàmies refines to the maximum his art of constructing emotions. In orderly, seamless worlds, populated by professional solitary men who have everything under control with their calculator, mobile phone and high-cylinder-capacity car racing along deserted motorways, the implacable irruption of chance occurs, the unexpected encounter, the out-of-place words that break down barriers and breach the walls of dams.

Sergi Pàmies' writing becomes harder and more mineral as it progresses. His contemplation of matters like death and illness suggests an effort to understand. The desolation and sadness in which his stories are steeped does not lead to self-pitying masochism but the value of speaking of, and looking with wide-open eyes at suffering and dying. To some extent, we have the opposite of classical catharsis here: these are not stories for being lulled in fiction, and suffering and crying with the characters so that they'll come through and be freed of their emotion, but rather of projecting these emotions in a detailed and almost hyperrealist fashion and of serenely pondering their objectification. The book batters and demands measured and reiterated reading, bit by bit, but it brings the reader back to life full of wild happiness and sometimes freed of the burden of false idols and the half-hopes that cloud the mirror. There is no self-help or literary therapy. He leaves you shelterless, out in the harsh weather of the steppes.

This necessary, chiselled writing coming out of expressive urgency, of emotion that imposes itself and insists on a voice to regard it and give it form, has been able to become the vehicle of a true-ringing and lucid reflection on death and illness, on fear and suffering, on identity, writing and fiction. If there was still the odd drop of playfulness and gratuitous wit in Sergi Pàmies' more recent books, there is not an iota of that left in *Si menges una llimona sense fer ganyotes* [If You Eat a Lemon without Screwing up Your Face] (2006). In these stories, he's striving to distil shadows and objectify abysses, emotions and moral positions. As happens with the best poetry, the images, characters and situations are instruments for synthesising and constructing the aftertaste of unhappiness, separation, fear of one's own and other deaths, the sense of extreme provisionality... Dark-toned stories written in favour of happiness.

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A selection of texts

Text



WEB: "Destinataris"

Fragment d'aquest conte inclòs dins el llibre *Si menges una llimona sense fer ganyotes*.
<http://www.vilaweb.cat/www/lletres/lilibre?llibre=2067223>



WEB: El preu

Un conte de Pàmies al blog Històries de Viatger.
<http://historiesdeviatger.blogspot.com/2006/09/el-preu-per-sergi-pmies.html>



WEB: "La inmortalidad"

Sergi Pàmies visita la tomba de Salvat-Papasseit i expressa la seva admiració pel poeta a *El País* (10/02/06).
http://www.elpais.com/articulo/cataluna/inmortalidad/elpepiautcat/20060210elpcat_4/Tes/



WEB: "Cocodrilo de agua dulce"

Article dedicat a Jesús Moncada en motiu de la seva mort, a *El País* (14/06/05).
http://www.elpais.com/articulo/cultura/Cocodrilo/agua/dulce/elpporcul/20050614elpepicul_5/Tes/



WEB: Pàmies a EPdLP

Nota biogràfica i dos textos a El Poder de la Palabra.
<http://www.epdlp.com/escritor.php?id=3800>



WEB: Si tu manges un citron sans faire de grimaces [If You Eat a Lemon Without Pulling a Face]

Fragment of this book by Pàmies translated into French.
<http://www.l-che.net/article-24582230.html>

Bio-bibliography

Biography



WEB: A la Hiperenciclopèdia

http://www.enciclopedia.cat/fitxa_v2.jsp?NDCHEC=0239132



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

<http://cultura.gencat.net/ilc/qqq/FitxaAutors.asp?nom1=pam&nom2=&cerca=Cerca&quinform=form1&NRegistre=3&idregistre=5187>



WEB: The author in the Catalan Encyclopaedia

<http://www.grec.cat/cgibin/hecangcl2.pgm?&USUARI=&SESSIO=&NDCHEC=0239132&PGMORI=E>

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WEB: A la Viquipèdia

Breu biografia, bibliografia, premis i enllaços al web de l'enciclopèdia lliure.

http://ca.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sergi_Pàmies



WEB: The author in the Who's Who of Catalan Literature

<http://cultura.gencat.net/ilc/qeq/FitxaAutorsuk.asp?nom1=p%E0mies&cercauk2=Search&quinform=form1&NRegistre=1&idregistre=5187>



WEB: In Wikipedia

Biographical note, works and links on the author in the free encyclopaedia.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sergi_Pàmies

Bibliography



WEB: Què hi ha a la Biblioteca de Catalunya

http://cataleg.bnc.cat/search*cat/?searchtype=a&searcharg=P%C3%A0mies+Sergi&sortdropdown=-&searchscope=13&searchscope2=13&SORT=D



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

http://ccuc.cbuc.cat/search*cat/a?SEARCH=P%C3%A0mies+Sergi&sortdropdown=-&searchscope=23



WEB: Què hi ha a les biblioteques públiques

<http://argus.biblioteques.gencat.cat/iii/encore/search/C|SP%C3%A0mies+Sergi|Orightresult|U1?lang=cat&suite=pearl>



WEB: Per comprar-ne llibres

<http://www.llibres.cat/ca/detall-autor/pamies-sergi>



WEB: Articles de l'autor (Traces)

<http://traces.uab.cat/search?f=author&p=P%C3%A0mies%20Sergi&sc=1&ln=ca>



WEB: Articles sobre l'autor (Traces)

http://traces.uab.cat/search?ln=ca&p=P%C3%A0mies%2C+Sergi&f=keyword&action_search=Cerca&c=Traces+%3A+base+de+dades+de+llengua+i+literatura+catalanes&sf=&so=d&rm=&rg=10&sc=1&of=hb



WEB: Works in the Biblioteca de Catalunya

http://cataleg.bnc.cat/search*eng/?searchtype=a&searcharg=P%C3%A0mies+Sergi&sortdropdown=-&searchscope=13&searchscope2=13&SORT=D



WEB: The author in The European Library

<http://search.theeuropeanlibrary.org/portal/en/search/%28%22creator%22+all+%22p%C3%A0mies+>

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sergi%22%29.query



WEB: The author in the Congress Library (US)

<http://catalog.loc.gov/cgi-bin/Pwebrecon.cgi?DB=local&PAGE=First>



WEB: The author in the COPAC Catalogue (UK)

<http://copac.ac.uk/search?&au=Sergi+P%C3%A0mies>

Comments on the author

Criticism



WEB: Sergi Pàmies a l'AELC

Inclou biografia, obra, premis, transcripció d'articles, fragments de la seva obra i enllaços.

<http://www.escriptors.cat/autors/pamiess>



WEB: L'autor al Corpus Literari Ciutat de Barcelona

Biografia, informació bibliogràfica, enllaços i transcripció d'articles sobre Pàmies.

http://www.ducros.biz/corpus/index.php?command=show_news&news_id=2155



WEB: Pàmies a De llibres

Pàmies conversa amb Vicenç Villatoro, Natza Farré i Enrique Vila-Matas a propòsit de *Si menges una llimona sense fer ganyotes*. Al programa *De llibres* de TV3 (03/11/06).

http://www.tv3.cat/pvideo/AC_bbd_alternate.jsp?ID=215840487&CAT_ID=



WEB: Sergi Pàmies on the lletra website in Catalan

Including more resources.

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



WEB: Sergi Pàmies in AELC (Association of Catalan Language Writers)

Includes biography, works, prizes, interviews and links.

http://www.escriptors.cat/autors/pamiess/pagina.php?id_sec=3277



WEB: Sergi Pàmies in the City of Barcelona Literary Corpus

Biography, bibliographic information, links and transcription of articles on this author.

http://www.ducros.biz/corpus/index.php?command=show_news&news_id=2155

Miscellaneous



WEB: Pàmies a La Paraula Viva

Entrevista a l'autor a propòsit de l'exposició "Cultura catalana, singular i universal" de Frankfurt 2007 dins la sèrie "La Paraula Viva" de Vilaweb TV.

<http://www.vilaweb.tv/?video=5362&canal=58>

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WEB: Sergi Pàmies, escriptor

Pàmies reflexiona sobre l'entorn polític, l'esport i l'escriptura al programa *L'illa del tresor* del Canal 33 (17/10/06).

<http://www.tv3.cat/videos/214959999>



WEB: Pàmies a RAC1

Sergi Pàmies, crític de televisió a "El món a RAC1". A YouTube.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y6wCjTavku8>



WEB: Pàmies presenta Monsó

Sergi Pàmies comenta la novel·la *Un home de paraula* d'Imma Monsó a Ràdio Sant Cugat.

<http://www.cugat.cat/noticies/cultura/25751.htm?envoi=1¬e=5>



WEB: Pàmies in Rue des livres

List of Pàmies' published books with a brief review on the Rue des livres web site.

http://www.rue-des-livres.com/auteurs/1465/sergi_pamies.html



WEB: In Wikipedia

Brief biography, bibliography, prizes and links in the free on-line encyclopaedia.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sergi_P%C3%A0mies



WEB: Sergi Pàmies in IMDB

File on Sergi Pàmies as a scriptwriter of several films on The Internet Movie Database web site.

<http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0701610/>

Comments



PDF: "M'agraden els contes que parlen de l'ofici"

Noemí Bibolas entrevista l'escriptor a l'*Avui* (18/01/07).

<http://www.traces.uab.es/tracesbd/avui/av07046.pdf>



WEB: Paraula de Pàmies

L'autor és entrevistat a Vilaweb en motiu de la publicació de *Si menges una llimona sense fer ganyotes* (19/09/06).

http://www.vilaweb.cat/www/noticia?p_idcmp=2062867



WEB: Cara a cara

Sergi Pàmies respon a les preguntes de Víctor Colomer sobre la seva infantesa i la seva relació amb Sabadell.

<http://www.drac.com/cac/200206/20020614.html>



WEB: "Pàmies: directe ala intimitat"

Ressenya del recull de contes *Si menges una llimona sense fer ganyotes* al web Somos lo que

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leemos.

<http://criticaliteraria.wordpress.com/category/sergi-pamies/>



WEB: "La fredor sentimental"

Ponç Puigdevall comenta els diferents reculls de contes publicats per l'autor, a *El País* (05/10/06).
http://www.ducros.biz/corpus/index.php?command=show_news&news_id=3199



PDF: "L'última hora de Pàmies"

Joan Manuel Matoses ressenya *L'últim llibre de Sergi Pàmies* a la revista *Caràcters*, núm. 14 (gener 2001).

<http://www.traces.uab.es/tracesbd/caracters/ca014.pdf>



WEB: Sobre *Si menges una llimona sense fer ganyotes*

Ressenya de Josep Vidalsobre aquest recull de contes de l'autor publicada al web delibros.org.

http://www.delibros.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=27&Itemid=65



WEB: Sobre *L'instint*

Ressenya de Jesús M. Tibau sobre *L'instint* al seu bloc Tens un racó dalt del món.

<http://jmtibau.blogspot.com/2008/04/instint-de-sergi-pmies.html>



WEB: "Sergi ville nouvelle"

Natalie Levisalles reviews the translation into French of *L'últim llibre de Sergi Pàmies*, in the newspaper *Libération* (06/12/07).

<http://www.liberation.fr/livres/0101117010-sergi-ville-nouvelle>



WEB: "Catalan is a great European language"

Abstract in English of the news on the translation into French of *L'últim llibre de Sergi Pàmies* published in the French newspaper *Libération* (06/12/07).

http://www.eurotopics.net/en/dienste/autoreindex/autor_pamies_sergio/



WEB: Two Reviews

File on Sergi Pàmies and two reviews of *Si tu menges una llimona sense fer ganyotes* [If You Eat a Lemon Without Pulling a Face] and *L'últim llibre de Sergi Pàmies* on the Evene web site.

<http://www.evene.fr/celebre/biographie/sergi-pamies-30253.php>



WEB: On *L'últim llibre de Sergi Pàmies*

Review of this book of short stories by de Pàmies on the web bibliosurf.com web site.

<http://www.bibliosurf.com/Le-dernier-livre-de-Sergi-Pamies>