

volumen, está como aquél llamado a convertirse en material de referencia necesario para todo estudioso de la producción literaria y cinematográfica hispánica.

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## CREACIÓN

Sergi Pàmies. *Sentimental*. Barcelona, Anagrama, 1995, 142 pp.

With only three novels and two collections of short stories, Sergi Pàmies has already established himself as one of the foremost narrators to emerge from Catalonia in recent years. *Sentimental*, his last novel, is an extremely precise, amusing and thought provoking narrative. Despite its title, or because of it, the reader is invited to witness a vertiginous fugue from one's own certainties. Nothing sentimental about it. And yet, the reader can't help but feeling a sort of sentimental bond with the protagonist, an unnamed Belgian middle-class man who one day walks out of his house to get a pack of cigarettes only to discover that the small grocery store has caught on fire. What catches fire, what explodes, literally, is the unnamed thirty-something Belgian man's routine. And with it, all the small and big certainties that modern urban life is built on. Pàmies has a special talent to capture that moment in which reality cracks open and what lies beneath or below takes over. In this sense, he belongs in a very rich tradition of Catalan short-story writers. Most assuredly, his literary filiation can be traced to the worlds of Pere Calders and Quim Monzó, arguably the masters of Catalan short fiction, who always combine social commentary, fantastic humor and tenderness. In a large context, Pàmies' work stems from Kafka, Borges and Calvino, the big masters of fantastic fictional simmetries. What makes Pàmies' world unique, however, is his ability to weave postmodern moral tales out of trivia material. And, in *Sentimental*, Pàmies takes that talent one step further when he builds a story that manages to posit some of mankind's most pressing existential questions out of a montage of newspaper «faits divers.» The passing of time, the feeling of radical alienation and the quest for spiritual meaning are all embedded in the adventures of Pàmies' anti-hero. Most interestingly, Pàmies wisely uses the «fin-de-millennium malaise» to present a humoristic version of the spatial trip in search of extraterrestrial contact. This is no science-fiction story. In fact, as I mentioned, Pàmies' protagonist is only going out to get his cigarettes. He is not even conscious of his quest. His escape becomes a sort of emblematic fall, not from grace but out of dis-grace. This modern everyman is caught in a dizzying acceleration of events that escape his control. Aren't we all? And yet, nothing in Pàmies' restrained, detached

and analytical prose betrays his moral undertone. The reader is always torn between his/her unwillingness to suspend disbelief and his/her surprise to find how close he/she really is from the misadventures of the unnamed protagonist. Truly unnamed? Unlike most of his previous protagonists, Pàmies chooses to give a name to his Belgian white collar protagonist, albeit a false one: «Sonríe, incapaz de dominar la excitación. Para él, los que cambian de identidad tienen que ser por fuerza delincuentes, terroristas implicados en matanzas colectivas... En cambio, él no es más que un ex-oficinista belga. Y ahora, de golpe, tiene la oportunidad de cambiar de nombre, de país, de vida, todo a la vez, sin haber cometido ningún crimen, arrastrando la pequeña y relativa culpa de no haber avisado a la familia... Según el pasaporte que hay en el cajón de la mesita de noche, se llama Lourenço Oliveira. El pasaporte, sin embargo, es falso, lo mismo que el color negro de su pelo» (53-4). This exhilarating awareness arrives after Oliveira has survived the initial fire, a plane crash, a hospital escape and the crossing of the Atlantic aboard a cargo ship bound for Rio de Janeiro. In Brazil, his benefactor, Horacio, the cook of the cargo ship who has befriended him, manages to find him this new identity, and with it, a new life, or, better put, a new lease on life, since Oliveira's fugue will not stop after his happy marriage to Iris, the fifty year old airport announcer, a woman whose voice so captivates Oliveira that he will not stop until getting her attention and finally marrying her. Oliveira's new conjugal bliss will be suddenly interrupted one day when he is sitting comfortably watching his «zapatillas luminosas,» the weird birthday present from his wife Iris: «Tiembra. Los entes se le acercan. Tras un lapso que él interpreta como de observación, se lo tragan sin darle tiempo a resistirse. Una vez engullido, Oliveira continúa en la misma posición; exacta. Curiosamente, la luz de las zapatillas recupera potencia. Siente que está en el comedor y al mismo tiempo percibe que lo ha engullido una masa que no aprecia material pero sí mentalmente. La define como una gelatina invisible» (101-2). With this final humoristic twist, Pàmies seems to condense that ability to move from trivial fact to transcendental reality. Here, a present which Oliveira considered something rather crass and unimportant has become the focal point in the attraction of these aliens who, as we will soon learn, constitute a collective of intersected beings that share a common essence: their shyness. With this metaphorical representation of the engulfment of his shy protagonist, Pàmies plays with the fin-de-millennium obsession with aliens while reintroducing some of the compelling existential questions of our urban postindustrial society, where the levels of anonymity and interchangeability have reached truly alienating levels. Oliveira, thus, becomes the paradigmatic alien, given both his alienated identity and his illegal immigrant status. He is Pàmies' tender and comic version of the migrant subject, that new «locus amenus» of postmodern thought.

I will not reveal the final surprise in this book full of surprises. I will say, however, that with *Sentimental* Sergi Pàmies has certainly managed to create a powerful and suggestive narrative that captures the urban angst of our time without giving in to any sentimentalism. And that is indeed no minor achievement.

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JAUME MARTÍ-OLIVELLA

Ana Rodríguez-Fischer. *Objetos extraviados*. Barcelona, Lumen, 1995, 200 pp.

This novel transforms raw autobiographical material into fiction through the story of a woman associated with one of the most extraordinary artistic groups in modern Spain. The narration itself is complex: Rodríguez-Fischer experiments with technique and perspective, using her subject as the means to explore dimensions that transcend the personal story. The protagonist's unsentimental review of her life is bittersweet, tinged with irony; her remarks expose a subversive and critical attitude that characterized her generation.

Maruja Mallo (1902-1995) was born in Galicia but went to Madrid when she was a young woman. There she associated with members of the Generation of 1927, forming friendships and taking part in their activities. She was a well-known artist in her own right: her vanguardist paintings gained international recognition. She also shared the fate of other intellectuals of her day: a long period of exile (1937-62), the return to her homeland, the inevitable disillusionment and alienation as she saw the conformism that permeated life under the Franco regime.

The retrospective «autobiography» begins in a hospital where Mallo lies dying. Thus sterile, confining space is the point of departure for an incursion into the past and a chronological journey through her life, which she describes with the sensitivity of an artist rather than the detailed eye of a chronicler. Disjointed sensations, ideas, and visual images become the springboard for memory, a technique which gives an oneiric, surrealist quality to the chapters of her life. The title itself is a quotation from Gómez de la Serna («El sueño es un depósito de objetos extraviados»), an apt way to show how she gathers in her memories and displays them in her highly personal style. The opening words are one example: «Tubos. Plástico. Transparencia. Suero. Gotas. Gotas lentas, tristes. Monotonía. Silencio» (13).

With death as an ever-present leitmotif, Mallo reviews the events in her life, moving from her childhood in Galicia, her experiences in Madrid (art school, discovery of the city, relationship with the intellectuals of the day), her days as an art teacher in Arévalo, to the years of self-exile in South American and eventual return. Interspersed throughout this life