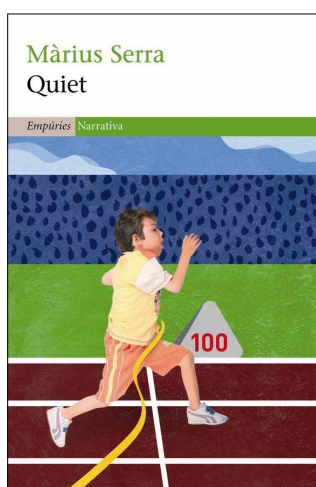


Our normality

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Màrius Serra: *Quiet*
Barcelona: Empúries, 2008



Màrius Serra: *Quieto*
Barcelona: Anagrama, 2008

This is an article written from a most biased perspective. I will, then, begin by placing some cards on the table.

The first: I was for some years Màrius Serra's editor, making me a privileged spectator, from the very boilerhouse, of a process which so resoundingly culminates in *Quiet*. The second: we had not only a professional relationship, and an ongoing friendship, but also as chance would have it found ourselves living in very similar situations: when Lluís, the immobile protagonist of *Quiet*, was born, Clara had been with us for ten years. The third: as a result of both these circumstances, I became a real and recognisable character in a number of Màrius Serra's stories. First, and mainly as an editor, in *De com s'escriu una novel·la*. Later, as the father of a girl of Lluís's ethnicity, in *Quiet*. Which is why I find it very easy to speak



about the book, and yet this is at the same time a particularly difficult article to write.

Whether they know it or not, in one way or another, to a greater or lesser extent, however it may be, writers always write from their own experience. Some conceal this, may even deny it, while others play with the truth which is, I am convinced, inevitable. Màrius Serra is one of the latter, and I would say that it was when he became fully aware of this that there occurred a shift dividing his initial works from the novel *Mon oncle*, the cornerstone of his first creative maturity. In the stories of *Línia*, for example, it was quite easy to suppose that many of the urban and human landscapes were close to the author's experience, but this remained a supposition. *Mon oncle*, meanwhile, is an exercise in autofiction based on family figures and stories barely concealed by the fact that the identity of the protagonist, Canut, is not that of the author.

Today we can in Serra's work make out three pathways advancing in parallel and at times crossing over. There has, in the first instance, been a continuation of his more strictly enigmatic work, as exemplified by *Verbàlia*. Then we have the more clearly fictional narratives of *AblatanatalbA* and *Farsa*. And thirdly, those accounts involving less fiction, increasingly rooted in reality itself as the stuff of literature. As I mentioned, in *Mon oncle* the narrative was to an extent family heritage. His next work, *La vida normal*, presents a series of "stories with no interposed narrative persona" exploring the distance between reality and story. In *De com s'escriu una novel·la* the author turns his apparent failure in a narrative project into an editorial and literary autobiography. Lastly, as if the next step in a planned sequence, *Quiet* deals openly with "seven years in the life of our son Lluís Serra

Pablo, alias Llullu", who "was born with a serious encephalopathy which neurological science has not yet successfully defined".

As far as I know *Quiet* has received only

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praise. Perhaps this was inevitable: who would dare criticise the book without in some way appearing disrespectful of the experience it recounts? And I feel that Serra has skilfully dealt with that also. He does not forsake the lure of shamelessness or a possible appeal to compassion: *Quiet* is about his son Lluís and himself, about living with multiple disability and the difficulty in doing so within society. Many readers have been touched by its *drama*. Yet Serra has the virtue of speaking with humour, with a far from easy personal honesty, preserving both his dignity and that of Lluís. And so the *drama* turns into an even more troubling normality.

All those of us who share the experience of abnormality owe much to *Quiet*. The book has the ability to make visible the invisible from the perspective of the most singular experience without attempting at any time to generalise. It reveals, so to speak, the pride of difference, which is nothing more than the acceptance of each individual's conditions of life, the normality of abnormality. The first step in coming to terms with the effort involved in going beyond one's apparent limits. And that is of value to anyone. For those who are *normal* and those who are *abnormal*. If, deep down, there is any difference.

