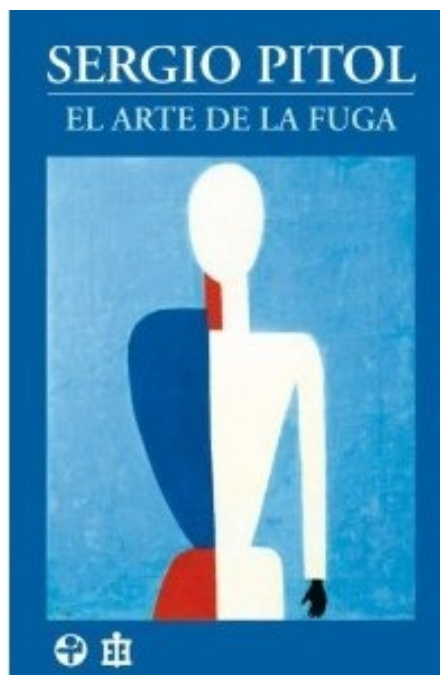




El arte de la fuga

Sergio Pitol

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El arte de la fuga Sergio Pitol

The debut work in English by Mexico's greatest and most influential living author and winner of the Cervantes Prize ("the Spanish language Nobel"), *The Art of Flight* takes the reader on a whirlwind tour of the world's cultural capitals as Sergio Pitol looks back on his well-traveled life as a legendary author, translator, scholar, and diplomat.

The first work in Pitol's "Trilogy of Memory," *The Art of Flight* imaginatively blends the genres of fiction and memoir in a Borgesian swirl of contemplation and mystery, expanding our understanding and appreciation of what literature can be and what it can do.

El arte de la fuga Details

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Author : Sergio Pitol

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From Reader Review El arte de la fuga for online ebook

Ventura Medina says

Todo es una maravilla, pero tengo algunos favoritos:

1. El cariño con el que habla de Monsiváis.
 2. Que el famosísimo pasaje de "uno es los libros que ha leído" este precedido por un recordatorio de la felicidad que encuentra en su casa de Xalapa.
 3. El ensayo sobre Sostiene Pereira.
 4. En ensayo sobre el levantamiento zapatista y que incluya casi íntegro el comunicado de Marcos: ¿De qué nos van a perdonar?
 5. Su paso por Barcelona: pobreza y desesperación.
 6. El ensayo sobre el soldado Schveik.
-

Greg Fanoë says

I'm really far away from the cultural reference point of this book - lots of whole long essays on books I've never heard of by authors I've never heard of - but it a well-written, fun read.

Nate says

I really enjoyed this book, but I'm not sure what to say about it or how to review it probably.

Its writing feels musical (and in fact, the spanish word "fuga" translates to both 'flight' and 'fugue', as the translator's afterward points out).

Its certainly not for everyone, but the people that will be drawn to it will likely love it. Its soft and gentle in a way, and it meanders like a river or a long walk does. Some of the sections disguise itself as literary criticism, so if you don't enjoy criticism, you might not like it. But even in these sections, it feels both intensely personal and also slightly mysterious and dreamlike. I picked the book up, almost on accident, after finishing Don Quixote. I hadn't heard of it, but saw it won the Cervantes Prize, so I thought it would be an appropriate book to follow that read. I have to admit it took me a while to start it though.

It presents itself as a memoir, but its a creative and "literary" memoir, and therefor should not be read as an autobiography. There are not many events -- but there are many themes. They are presented with a subtlety & confidence than only a great craftsman can get away with. His writings on memory somewhat reminded me of WG Sebald, although I'm not sure if that's an appropriate comparison. The style and writing itself seems soft, blissful, and musical. The text flows like water.

Each chapter contains the date it was written, and the result is sort of a collage of journal entries, placed out of order. It is divided into four bigger sections. It will inevitably add a long list of books you want to read to your list. Pitol is passionate about reading, was a translator, and writes about literature as much as he writes about his life. The most touching story, for me, was about his seeing a hypnotist. There are many stylistic shifts in the book, but they are unified by his voice.

This book is the first of a "trilogy of memory" and they are all being translated by George Hensen and published by Deep Vellum. Picking up this book was a discovery for me of the translator and publisher as well as the writer. Deep Vellum is a non profit based in Texas. Hensen, who I had never heard of, did a great job with the translation -- the language works well in English, and I feel a poetry to the movement that reminds me of other translators I love Chris Andrews and Margeret Jill-Costa. (Disclaimer: I do not read any other language than English, so my assumptions on what makes a good translator might be inaccurate, and at the least aren't informed of the nuances of its craft. However, I've definitely noticed liking some translators more than others, particularly when reading widely translated writers).

Pitol has many fans in the Spanish language, including Bolano & Villa-Matis. I am very excited to have just learned about him, grateful he is starting to be translated while simultaneously disappointed he wasn't translated until now. Both this book and Roberto Bolano's Between Parenthesis discuss a novel Pitol wrote that I really, really, really hope gets translated next.

Caroline says

I have been holding this back thinking I was going to right a review worthy of the book, but life has intervened. I'm just saying that it was wonderful, wonderful, wonderful; a bibliophile's delight. It is going on my favorite's list, and only two or three books a year make the cut.

Now on to the next two volumes of this trilogy, also published/to be published by Deep Vellum. Just about anything you buy from them will be a good investment.

Oscar Calva says

Cuando se habla de los grandes escritores latinoamericanos de la generación del boom se habla de Fuentes, Cortázar, García Márquez, Onetti. Rara vez se habla de Sergio Pitol. Pero incluso en México, al hablar y hacer antologías de los grandes escritores nacionales se recuerda el trabajo de Paz, del mismo Fuentes, de Arreola, Poniatowska, Monsivais. Casi nadie incluye a Pitol en esos listados, una gran parte del público lector ni siquiera lo conoce, no se lee en las escuelas, sus trabajos publicados parecen reliquias difíciles de encontrar, en un puñado de editoriales y ediciones, y un muy reducido numero de ejemplares en una que otra librería. Es una verdadera pena.

Hace poco leí un artículo publicado en junio de este año sobre la enfermedad mental en etapa terminal en que se encuentra el autor, la que soporta en la mas completa soledad, sin amigos que lo visiten, sin el mundo de políticos, escritores, autoridades culturales que llegaron a rodearle en sus años de diplomático, catedrático, editorialista, apenas rodeado de su familia mas cercana. Un escritor olvidado, de trabajos olvidados, conocido en gran parte solamente por el mundillo cultural y literario. Aquí mismo en Goodreads, ésta que es su obra más popular tiene apenas unos 200 reviews, y no se entiende porqué uno de tan sólo 6 mexicanos que ha ganado el Premio Cervantes, el máximo reconocimiento de las letras hispanas (el tercer mexicano en lograrlo después de Paz y Fuentes), sea un verdadero fantasma en el mundo y en su país.

Y para mi lo mas lamentable es que de esos 6 escritores, probablemente sea Pitol el escritor más talentoso, si bien no el más prolífico, probablemente sea el escritor más innovador de los 6 aunque nunca haya obtenido la mitad siquiera del reconocimiento del gran público que se le extiende a los otros, a pesar de los múltiples reconocimientos y premios literarios que ha recibido.

A Pitol hay que leerlo. Y hay que leerlo no solamente por conocer su trabajo, o por sus reconocimientos y premios. Hay que leerlo simplemente porque leer a Pitol es una delicia, un verdadero agasajo. Y *El Arte de la Fuga* es probablemente un buen lugar para empezar a leerlo si no se ha hecho. A manera de memorias compuestas por ensayos y ejercicios narrativos breves como en un diario, Pitol escribe de sus experiencias como escritor, diplomático, traductor, y eterno viajero. Escribe también de los libros y del arte de escribir, de Chejov, de Henry James, de Gombrowicz, de las múltiples ciudades donde vivió por todo el mundo, de su amistad con Monsiváis, de la hipnosis, de los comics de la Familia Burrón. Pitol es también un alquimista de la escritura, en estas entradas de diario mezcla sin el mayor esfuerzo de una manera muy fluida y apenas perceptible ensayos, ficciones, ejercicios periodísticos, crónicas, su mente y su pluma viajan por todos lados, se fugan, van y vienen, pero el resultado es una obra bastante digerible, que se lee fácil, se disfruta, se vive. No importa que sus textos estén llenos de temas y referencias culturales y literarias, o que el lector no conozca medio cacahuete de los autores sobre los que escribe, el lector promedio puede sumergirse en un ensayo sobre Thomas Mann con la facilidad de estar viendo una película de guerra, y aunque Pitol es un verdadero erúdito el texto no suena pomposo o pretencioso como sucede con otros escritores de ensayos literarios que escriben más para sí mismos que para sus lectores.

5 estrellas, y solamente porque no se le pueden poner 6.

Jim Elkins says

The Literary Life as a Cocoon

I bought this the moment I saw Vila-Matas had written an introduction. He calls Pitol "the greatest Spanish-language writer of our time," says he has a "passion for confusing life and literature," and that the crucial marker of his style is the idea of "fleeing anyone who is so dreadful as to be full of certainty."

But this book is disappointing. Pitol does confuse life and literature, or rather, he is immersed in literary imagining, and his mind is populated mainly by the names and lives of hundreds of authors. In that it's like Vila-Matas's "Dublinesque" and his other books. But an indifferently veiled autobiography of the author whose imagination consists entirely of other authors is not an easy subject. One thing it requires, I would think, is real engagement with the ghosts, the literary voices, the contemporaries. Vila-Matas's "Bartleby & Co." does that very well, because it is about paralysis, inaction, abnegation, and the lack of words. Here the names are just a cavalcade of Mexican and other authors, as in some of Bolaño's work, but without even his interest in mixing literature, imaginary stories and real politics.

Pitol is safe inside his world of authors: they are a comfort to him, they're the air he breathes, they nourish his imagination. The authors he thinks of do not haunt him (as writers haunt Pessoa, Borges, Bolaño, as they bewitch "Bartleby & Co."). In fact the novels Pitol has read seem barely to talk to him except in generalities and stray remembered quotations that serve more as decorations than insights, and this novel's philosophic moments are mainly asides that come up when Pitol has a temporary respite from the continuous rain of thoughts about publishing, fame or its absence, literary lineages, schools, manners, communities, and histories.

This is the literary life as cocoon. Sometimes the threads of an author's cocoon can be so fine, so capacious, that they seem like the air itself. The cocoon seems to disappear, and the author imagines himself in touch with the raw world itself. But this is not life, this is embalmed and becalmed and proof against any intrusion. Pitol reminds me, in that respect, of the late Bellow, so warmed by his self-regard and the praise of the friends and readers he'd chosen.

The only parts of the world that intrude are clichés. The book opens with some awful pages about Venice, in which the narrator rehearses all sorts of commonplaces about the city: he knows they are episodes from the history of the city, because he's read so much fiction and poetry set in Venice: but it doesn't seem to occur to him they are all, every last one of them, comforting clichés, received knowledge, the sort of thing Bouvard and Pécuchet would have tried and abandoned, the sort of thing Pessoa or Beckett or Bernhard would never go near.

John Trefry says

Having a hard time with the "Here's who I've known" and "Here's how I've done it" author books these days.

Luis Reséndiz says

conforme lo leía me daba cuenta de la mucha falta que me hacía leer a Pitol. no solo porque encuentro alguna afinidad con él ¿irse lejos de casa pronto, o nacer y crecer en Veracruz?, sino porque su prosa, diáfana y transparente, es un logro en sí misma; la forma ¿esta búsqueda incesante a la vez que huida de la definición? le hace transitar por muchas veredas; del ensayo a la autoficción a la crónica de viaje. lo mejor, creo, es el recuento de largo aliento del levantamiento zapatista y todo aquello en lo que aparece Monsiváis (incluyendo ese magnífico y desafortunadamente breve ensayo dedicado a la familia Burrón). un libro al que, lo sé desde ahora, volveré en innumerables ocasiones.

Tom says

The Art of Flight is the first of three memoirs by the Mexican writer Sergio Pitol, and the first of any of his books to be translated (quite ably) into English. Unfortunately, we're meeting Pitol at the end of his career, when illness now prevents him from writing. Fortunately, however, we are meeting Pitol. How can I not like a writer who translated Matthew Lewis's *The Monk*, quotes Julien Green (why have his books been allowed to go out of print?), and finds the movie *Johnny Guitar* laughable junk? Pitol (for whom *The Art of Flight* is his first book translated into English) has the imaginative digressive quality of César Aira, the amiable literariness of Enrique Vila-Matas, and the sensibility of both for the absurd, told in conversational tones. Pitol, Aira, and Vila-Matas are writers who could turn a description of a sidewalk crack into a Scheherazadean fugue.

Beyond the whimsical is his intelligent analyses of numerous authors, many new to me—Benito Pérez Galdós, Chekhov, Jaroslav Hasek (primarily *The Good Soldier Svejk*), Gabriel Vargas (cartoonist), Thomas Mann, Marcel Schwob (*The Children's Crusade*), José Vasconcelos, and Antonio Tabucchi: highbrow, lowbrow, in between; comic, dramatic, melodramatic; Russian, Italian, Polish, Mexican, German: Pitol's tastes range widely, and his explications of their works is compelling. Although he doesn't say so, I wonder if in reading and thinking about Vasconcelos, Pitol ever squirmed about the parallels between the two: both authors spent their careers in politics (Pitol as an ambassador) and their avocations as writers; both authors garnered enormous respect at home as writers. Vasconcelos, however, became increasingly angry, racist, and elitist over time. Pitol—as especially the last essay of the book (on Subcomandante Marcos and the Zapatista Army) makes clear—never went in that direction.

George Henson's translation of the book is seamless. I don't speak, write, or read Spanish, but the Pitol he's

captured here is a writer who effortlessly shuttles among varying rhetorical registers—usually of an intimate yet bright, easy manner—subtleties that surely require a deft ear and vocabulary to capture.

Guso says

Una colección de textos para escritores... para lectores. Es lindo conocer de dónde nacen las letras de los que admiramos.

Guillermo Gonca says

En fechas recientes (2018) falleció Sergio Pitol, escritor, traductor y diplomático mexicano ganador del premio Cervantes. Su época de mayor auge corresponde a finales del siglo XX, y sus obras más aclamadas son dos trilogías; la primera es narrativa y se le conoce como “El tríptico del carnaval”, mientras que la segunda es autobiográfica y se titula “Trilogía de la memoria”. Esta última inicia con el que podría ser el libro más famoso del autor, “El arte de la fuga”, publicado por Editorial Era en el año de 1996 y que comentaremos a continuación.

Este libro no puede clasificarse dentro de un género definido; acaso habremos de llamarle “híbrido” pues en su contenido encontraremos elementos de ensayo, relato de no ficción, autobiografía, crónica y nuevo periodismo. Si bien, su propósito fundamental es el de fungir como un libro de memorias, la informalidad del estilo y la innovadora prosa nos obliga a considerarla una obra ecléctica y posmodernista. Las referencias más cercanas podrían ser las novelas de Enrique Vila-Matas y algo de la parte central de “Los detectives salvajes” de Roberto Bolaño.

El título “El arte de la fuga” se refiere al gusto (o la urgencia) del escritor por viajar, conocer lugares emblemáticos y alejarse de la problemática de la propia patria. Pero también se refiere a la evasión de los recuerdos dolorosos; en especial la traumática muerte de la madre, ocurrida en plena infancia del escritor y que será tema recurrente en sus escritos autobiográficos.

El estilo es informal y “metaliterario”; una amalgama en la que todos los géneros parecen fusionarse. Además la estructura de sus escritos resulta bastante inusual (más que relatos parecen “entradas” de una bitácora personal), pues el escritor utiliza un extraño esquema en el que el tiempo avanza y retrocede de manera premeditada. A pesar de todo, Pitol posee la gran virtud de la transparencia y el lector se acostumbra rápidamente a su estilo decididamente disperso y a su manejo del tiempo no lineal. Por supuesto, ayuda mucho que haya dividido sus escritos por temas, de otra manera estaríamos hablando de una obra que carece completamente de estructura.

Veamos los tres apartados en los que se divide “El arte de la fuga”:

-El primero llamado “Memoria” es el más narrativo de los tres y nos habla de las experiencias de juventud del escritor, así como de su paso por países como España, Italia y Polonia, lugares en donde cumple su trabajo como traductor y agregado cultural. Los mejores momentos quizás sean el relato epifánico “Vindicación de la hipnosis” y las remembranzas de “Con Monsivaís el joven”, en donde Pitol hace los honores a sus dos grandes amigos (y también estupendos escritores) Carlos Monsivaís y José Emilio Pacheco.

-En el segundo apartado titulado “Escritura”, el autor muestra su faceta más ensayística, pues habla sobre sus propios escritos, el arte en general y también sobre los escritores y libros que le inspiraron. El mejor aporte pudiera ser “La marquesa nunca se resignó a quedarse en casa” en donde Pitol parafrasea a Cortázar y revalora la literatura narrativa.

-El tercero llamado “Lecturas”, se asemeja mucho al anterior, pero ahora se refiere a temas más específicos. Aquí encontraremos estupendos mini-ensayos sobre Chéjov, Andrzejewski, Thomas Mann, José Vasconcelos e incluso un homenaje al caricaturista mexicano Gabriel Vargas. El libro cierra de manera brillante con la interesante crónica de un viaje a Chiapas, México, durante la insurrección indígena ocurrida en enero de 1994.

Con “El arte de la fuga” Sergio Pitol logró incrustarse en la modernidad sin caer en los excesos y la pedantería de otros autores con pretensiones similares. En su prosa se siente la sinceridad, la veracidad y la autenticidad que todo escritor debería ofrecer y que pocos logran. Al no ser un libro estrictamente de narrativa, lo recomiendo sólo a aquellos que gustan leer sobre biografías, libros y autores. Sin embargo, me pareció un primer tomo muy interesante (la trilogía se completa con “El viaje” y “El mago de Viena”), de modo que habrá mucho más por descubrir.

David says

Sergio Pitol, who I admit I've never heard of, was maybe an insightful thinker and maybe a wonderful novelist, but to me this "memoir" wasn't a great read. For one, marketing it as a book that "defies genre" is simply a cover for what felt like a hodgepodge of totally miscellaneous writing (diaries, articles on literature, some travelogues, some misc. thinking) put together haphazardly and sorted in only a semi-meaningful way. If you're reading this book to gain insight on the life of Pitol, you're likely to be disappointed. Besides a few episodic notes from his travels in Poland, Spain and Italy, there isn't much introspection into Pitol as a character - more his musings on Mexican and European culture. Furthermore, much of the literary articles are focused on works that are too obscure to the American reader to make sense of or appreciate in any meaningful way.

There's one short essay about the development of his ideas for his novel Love Parade - but of course that is not published in English, so it was of little value in relation to my readerly life.

Aaron (Typographical Era) says

I've just finished reading Sergio Pitol's The Art of Flight and my head really hurts. I'm not talking about one of those standard issue migraine headaches, with temples throbbing like they're about to burst through my skin while I fumble with the child-proof cap on a bottle of painkillers, desperate for relief. No, this is something different, something a tad on the painful side, but mostly pleasurable in nature. My brain feels as though it's literally expanding inside my skull from the sheer weight of the massive amount of knowledge that's been imparted to it by this book. I love this feeling. I want to make it last for as long as I can. I'm also about to physically collapse in exhaustion from it. Beware the side effects.

How am I supposed accurately describe the contents of this book to people? I feel that other kind of more traditional headache muscling its way in as I agonize over this very thought. Perhaps it's a task best left to the book publishing professionals and their publicists, but even they seem to struggle with this, placing the work squarely on the shelf labelled unclassifiable. Surely there has to be a way though? Once, for lack of

anything better, I referred to as a historical travel diary essay biography, but now, having finished the book, I realize that classification doesn't even begin to do it justice.

READ MORE:

<http://www.typographicalera.com/the-a...>

Tonymess says

It embarrasses us to be pilfering through other people's lives and at the same time we cannot help but do it.

Readers of Spanish language fiction would know of the Miguel de Cervantes Prize. An annual award that currently carries a prize of €125,000 The Miguel de Cervantes Prize is considered the most important award in Spanish language literature (according to the spain.info website it is!). It is awarded to a writer for their literary oeuvre, not a single work and although some citations state that it is announced every year on 23 April, the date which commemorates the death of the author of Don Quixote, the 2015 winner was announced in November with Spanish King Felipe VI presenting the award to Fernando del Paso on the 400th anniversary of Cervantes' death. In fact Cervantes actually died on 22 April 1616 however the Spanish commemorate his death on 23 April as it was the date he was buried (coinciding with the date of Shakespeare's death).

The Miguel de Cervantes Prize was created in 1974, although the first award was made in 1976. The candidates are nominated by the Spanish Royal Academy, by the Academies in Spanish-speaking countries and by former prize-winners. The chairman of the jury is the Spanish Minister of Culture and since 1980, it can only be awarded to a single candidate.

In 2005 Sergio Pitol became the third Mexican to win the award (Octavio Paz in 1981 and Carlos Fuentes in 1987 being the first two Mexican's to win the award), and for Pitol's work to remain unavailable in English is yet another example of the small representation that translated works hold in the English speaking world. New independent, not-for-profit, publisher Deep Vellum from Dallas Texas came to the rescue in 2015, bringing the first two volumes of Pitol's "Trilogy of Memory," to the English speaking world. The explanation by George Henson in his "Translator's Note" at the rear of "The Art of Flight"; "these three autobiographical volumes, comprised of diary entries, personal musings, travel writing, and literary essays", gives you a short idea of the make up of the initial offering in the trilogy. How to review what is basically a notebook? As Daniel Saldaña Paris says in his recent article "10 Essential Spanish-Language Books": "To call The Art of Flight autobiography, essay, or memoir is an understatement. Life, fiction, memories, and readings intertwine in this book with astonishing ease, and the result is a volume that reads like a novel." (see full list of the 10 "essential" books here <http://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by...>)

With a short introduction by friend and fellow Spanish language writer Enrique Vila-Matas, the work begins with Pitol travelling and misplacing his glasses, he is in Venice, blurry eyed with mists descending. Within a couple of pages you know that the theme of a blurry memory, shadows, snippets is about to pervade throughout

For my full review go to <http://messybooker.blogspot.com.au/20...>

Steven says

First of all, it's a lovely book, masterful in every respect...but then it seemed serendipitous in my reading because I've been thinking about these fragments that we shore against our ruin but then again (and a lot lately in re: to me) these fragments with which we create ourselves (and, yes, they are very nearly the same thing) and that is what Pitol does, creating himself through his travels, his relationships with books, friends, movies, politics, language...he emerges out of his writing and reading (and they are fragments, often essays, critical appraisals, ideas on writing, remembrances...)...there is also as opposed to a few other writers who Pitol brings me to mind - Sebald, Murnane - more of a propulsive and triumphant tone....while maybe all art is a papering over the abyss, *The Art of Flight* moves at a speed where you don't notice- you stare forward and keep going, I remember a few years K2Doggo saying something about Mann at a time where Mann was being piled on, and it was something that stuck with me...he said something like love him or hate him Mann was one of last centuries true practitioners of literature even if it was always capital L literature and it was always important to him...well, I've read no Mann (and this book will have your tbr or to buy list growing...) but Pitol seems to look at art in a similar way (and he loves Mann); literature is deadly important to him it has shaped his life and made him the being he is and that's what he wants to communicate to you, to me, the reader...it's ok to say this book changed my fucking life, and it is, I agree and it brings me joy, it's a balm...I also appreciate the way time is dealt with throughout, and the way you can see Pitol's mind working...the ridiculousness of certainty, I guess or maybe I am projecting, but life is short and time goes too fast and we know very little, how can we be certain, we try to be, we can try to learn and dig into the subtleties of a situation but our minds are limited, we must always be open, and Pitol is, even in the midst, he digs, remains uncertain, learns, gets a better feel, moves closer but never quite gets there...there are a great many things to take from this wonderful book and it lets you (me, the reader) supply some of them, many of them...and I did....but it's a beautiful book (a novel, essays,...?) and the translation by Henson is great. Pitol puts you in mind of a good companion and you can often disagree with him but he not only talks, he listens...and it's important and beautiful....generous and lively...deep Vellum: one of the best new small presses around...
