

IN MEMORIAM

**LORENZO GOMIS,
JOURNALIST
ACADEMICIAN
(1924-2005)**

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“The word is a weapon which goes off by itself without anyone giving a warning.
It doesn’t leave any blood in the mouth, but it’s terribly effective.
An adjective can be as effective as a guided missile, and it’s cheaper.”

Lorenzo Gomis

In the bygone days of 1995, the only reference I had regarding Lorenzo Gomis Sanahuja was that he had written a book on Journalism. During a trip, visiting bookstores, I found his book, *Teoría del periodismo: cómo se forma el presente* (Journalism theory: how the present is shaped), written four years earlier, in which the author talks about the importance of journalistic-type information in order to stimulate comments and share them with the social environment.

A The Catalanian journalist and writer, who had been born, lived and died in Barcelona, was for me a distant reference at that time. I read the book and began to respect him. Two years later, with the opportunity to do research for my doctorate, I consulted him with respect to his being my supervisor at the Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB). Even without knowing me, he promptly accepted and was surprised to learn that he was being read by some Brazilian researchers.

From then until now, I became familiar with and acquired several of his books. From then until now, journalism studies have increased in the entire world. From then until now, the National Forum of Brazilian Journalism Professors was created; the Brazilian Society of Journalism Researchers was founded; the National Federation of Brazilian Journalists has included debates of an academic nature – involving theory, ethics and aesthetics – in its events; centers and lines of research on Journalism have been developed in several Brazilian and overseas universities; the number of academic magazines specifically devoted to this area has increased.

And, from then until now, many congresses and events in general have expanded the presentation of works focused on Journalism.

From then until now, I learned that Lorenzo Gomis had founded the magazine *El Ciervo* (The Deer); had coordinated editorially the Barcelona newspaper *La Vanguardia* (The Vanguard); had directed *El Correo Catalan* (The Catalanian Courier); had been ombudsman at the Pompeu Fabra University in the Catalanian capital; had written several books of poetry and countless academic and journalistic articles; had won several awards in journalism and in the academic world (among them, in 1988, the Mass Communication Research award, promoted by the Catalanian regional government, published in book form as *teoria dels gèneres periodístics* [theory of journalistic genres]).

Born in 1924, Gomis formed part of a generation of journalists concerned with Spain's future in the era of Francisco Franco, the dictator who ruled the Iberian country from 1939 to 1975. Although he was not a militant leftist, Gomis, who was 12 years old when the Spanish Civil War began and 15 when it ended, had a Christian education and throughout his life molded a humanist personality that made him the ally of those who were fighting for the end of the dictatorship. The *El Ciervo* magazine was invaded at a certain time by order of the Franco government and the photos of the street riot are framed in the office of the periodical, which is completing 55 years of existence in 2006.

He was also an academician who never abandoned his principal activity, the journalistic profession. He continued the two activities together until the end. He exercised and reflected on the profession. He supervised countless theses at the UAB, where he was a professor during many decades and where he achieved the rank of full professor emeritus. Humble and curious, he made his questions – academic or journalistic – a means of expanding knowledge...but also a way to lead the interlocutor, because of his doubts, to study more or to remain even further in doubt. He was known as a journalist with a fine sense of irony, a man of “few words and many silences”, for whom “one is always beginning”.

His most fertile field of writing, in addition to poetry, was that of Journalism. Today, when studies in this area are growing, a tribute is due Lorenzo Gomis, who once, as he tells it, wondered what a theory of journalism should explain. And he answered himself: “a theory of journalism should explain how the media decides what it will say and why; a theory of journalism should offer an abstract model which makes it possible to understand why one news item takes the place of another and why we comment on one news item instead of on another”. And it

is in this respect that many researchers, professors and journalists from around the whole world focus their attention, from different perspectives. He published 32 years ago his first dense journalistic work, *El medio media: la función política de la prensa* (The halfway media: the political role of the press). In it he provided an approach to the emergence of and the need for journalism, laying the foundation for his subsequent, more specific studies in this area.

In the most recent numbers of the magazine which he had founded and directed for more than 50 years (www.elcievo.es), Lorenzo Gomis demonstrated a growing concern for the future of the planet and for the lack of social sensitivity. Lorenzo Gomis died on New Year's Eve of 2006, in his apartment on Balmes Street in Barcelona, only a few days after seeking information regarding the murder of a female beggar who was sleeping inside an automatic teller machine, on the street on which he was living, and was set afire by some youths, of whom one was a minor. He went to the place, sought information and, from the height of his 81 years of age, wondered about the limits of cruelty, the future of youth and of Europe and, with his perennial uneasiness and professional concern, about journalism's role in present-day society. His last piece of writing, published in the January 2006 edition of *El Ciervo*, was entitled "Christmas Tragedy", an editorial which was almost a news story about the beggar's death.

When he died, shortly afterwards, on December 31, 2005, he received several tributes. More than 500 people accompanied his burial in the Les Corts Cemetery in Barcelona on January 3 of this year. It was the recognition which had already begun during his lifetime. At the beginning of this year of 2006, he was exalted as a humanist, as a poet, as an academician and as a professional journalist. Lorenzo Gomis helped too much in the studies on journalism and in the consolidation of the latter as a field of research, linking it to the profession. He helped journalism to be more socially recognized, to be a daily general reference point for the public, making the things of this world – even though complex – more accessible and intelligible. This was the result – a beautiful result – of what he used to say was his "sojourn on earth"

PRINCIPAL BOOKS BY LORENZO GOMIS ON JOURNALISM

GOMIS, L. *El medio media: la función política de la prensa* (The halfway media: the political role of the press). Barcelona: Mitre, 1987 (updated edition).

GOMIS, L. *Teoria dels gèneres periodistics* (Theory of journalistic genres). Barcelona: Generalitat de Catalunya / Centre d'Investigació de la Comunicació, 1989.

GOMIS, L. *Teoria del periodismo: como se forma el presente* (Journalism theory: how the future is shaped). Barcelona: Paidós, 1991.

GOMIS, L. *La notícia: dret humà* (News: a human right). Barcelona: Baranova, 1993.

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